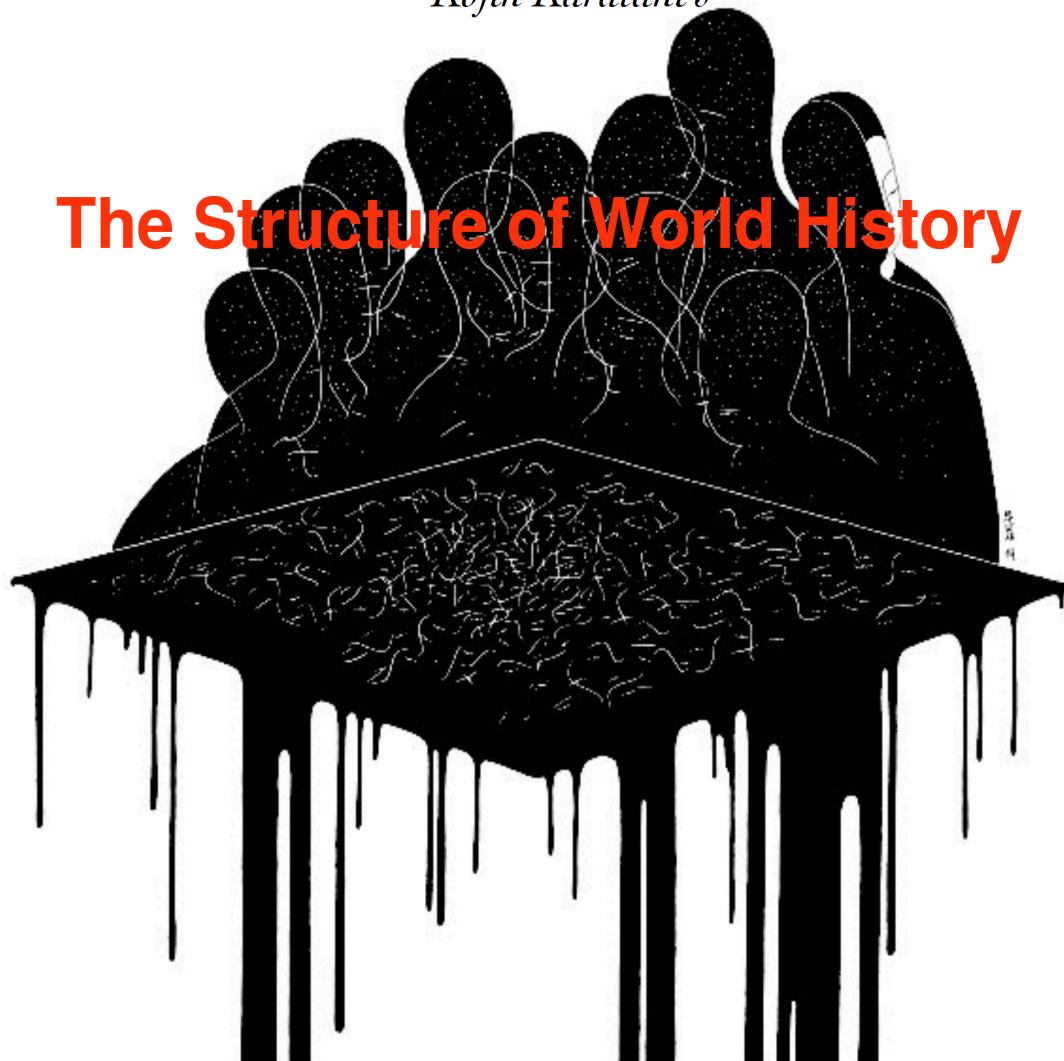


*Reading
Kojin Karatani's*

The Structure of World History



Chapters 11 & 12

- The Stages of Global Capitalism and Repetition
- Toward a World Republic

Questions and Comments

- What does Karatani mean by ‘the multitude’? Does he share Negri and Hardt’s conception of its social composition?
- Most importantly, does Karatani’s comment that ‘To wit, the people who were called the proletariat in the 1848 uprisings shouldn’t be thought of as industrial workers: they were in fact the multitude’ (p.295) relate in any way to his argument that revolutionary movements arise out of struggles not at the site of production but in the sphere of circulation?
- Is there a space for forcing (in Badiou’s sense) within Karatani’s framework?
- In what way might Mode D be mobilised in the form of a signifier of the left? Would it mean a leftist reclaiming of religious jouissance from the right?
- Karatani argues for a world republic. However, many indigenous intellectuals (Ailton Krenak, Nick Estes...) speak about « a world of many worlds ». Would a simultaneous revolution in many worlds overcome some of the problems of a simultaneous revolution in a single world? And if so, how could we begin to think what such a revolution would look like? Would it be substantially different from the programme Karatani outlines (consumer boycotts, producer co-ops, and military renunciation)?
- What is the difference between renouncing military power, and gifting military sovereignty to the UN? Has Karatani anywhere written about what it would mean for the UN to accept this gift - in terms of what (legal) structures would need to be in place, and what powers - if any - would thus be conferred? (I can see how land might be placed in a perpetual trust, but I’m not clear how military sovereignty could be so simply extracted from circulation - without there being some higher sovereignty to safeguard this, which is precisely what Karatani wants to avoid).
- Karatani often writes as if it is obvious that the problems that workers’ movements encountered in the 19th and 20th century would not necessarily be encountered by a consumer movement in the 21st. But surely many of his comments on the limitations of actual workers movements can also be made of actual consumer movements - in particular, their tendency to align workers-as-consumers with the interests of capital. I may have power over capital as a consumer, but if I need to eat and there is a famine, what good does that power do me? Or if I have to have a computer in order to apply for a job, and a smartphone in order to keep it? Isn’t there a tendency in these propositions to see the faults in the opposing position and ignore the potential weaknesses in one’s own?
- Is information really the negative form of Mode D? Or is it just a synonym for the CNS’s attempt to control consumers in the way the factory enabled them to control workers, by turning every aspect of our lives into a site of extraction? And if that is so, does Karatani’s call to organise consumers as workers not potentially come too late? Or is there something about “organising workers as consumers” that Karatani does not explain here, but which might be able to circumvent this ongoing counter-revolution?
- COMMENT: Karatani bases his sense of mode A on Mauss’s theory of the gift. Ivan Illich in his anthropologically-inspired work on vernacular values in the early 80s rejected Mauss’s theory as too simplistic, and preferred to approach mode A through Mauss’s student Robert Hertz’s work on asymmetry (left-handedness) as that which blocks the emergence of modes B and C. While gift-giving is competitive in the attempt to exhaust inequalities that have accumulated, asymmetry (e.g. reserved domains of activity for men and women) creates direct ground-level barriers to competition and thus prevents or limits the accumulation of power in the first place, replacing it instead with relations of necessary (rather than obligatory) complementarity and cooperation. A Hertzian-Illichian approach to the history of modes of circulation might then produce a more positive picture of mode A (one in which freedom and necessity are not experienced as opposed). And this might correlate more closely with the lived ontologies not only of non-state societies, but also of many religions, both universal and not.
- QUESTION: Does Karatani’s commitment to Mauss (and to Kant) not in fact end up committing him to a single transcendental viewpoint, from which freedom and obligation (ditto equality and inequality) are universal categories which exist independent of any transcritical attempt to decenter them? So that transcritique can in fact only operate *inside* these categories, rather than to suggest a larger plurality of experiences that exceeds them? Is it not the case that SWH actually offers, in many of its passages and arguments, a more homogenized form of transcendental than the one Gabriel suggested we might aspire to in the last session? Perhaps a critical approach to transcritique from this perspective would see it as itself a local position situated within some larger regime of relationality - something like Viveiros de Castro’s multiperspectivism - rather than as having itself located that regime as a manifestation of mode A from its own transcendental position, however mobile that position may be. Or does just asking these questions mean that I am, in fact, an unrepentant post-modernist?

Review of Chapter 10: Associationism

Kant negated religion absolutely and the Kantian “world republic” is only possible when both state (B) and capital (C) are transcended.

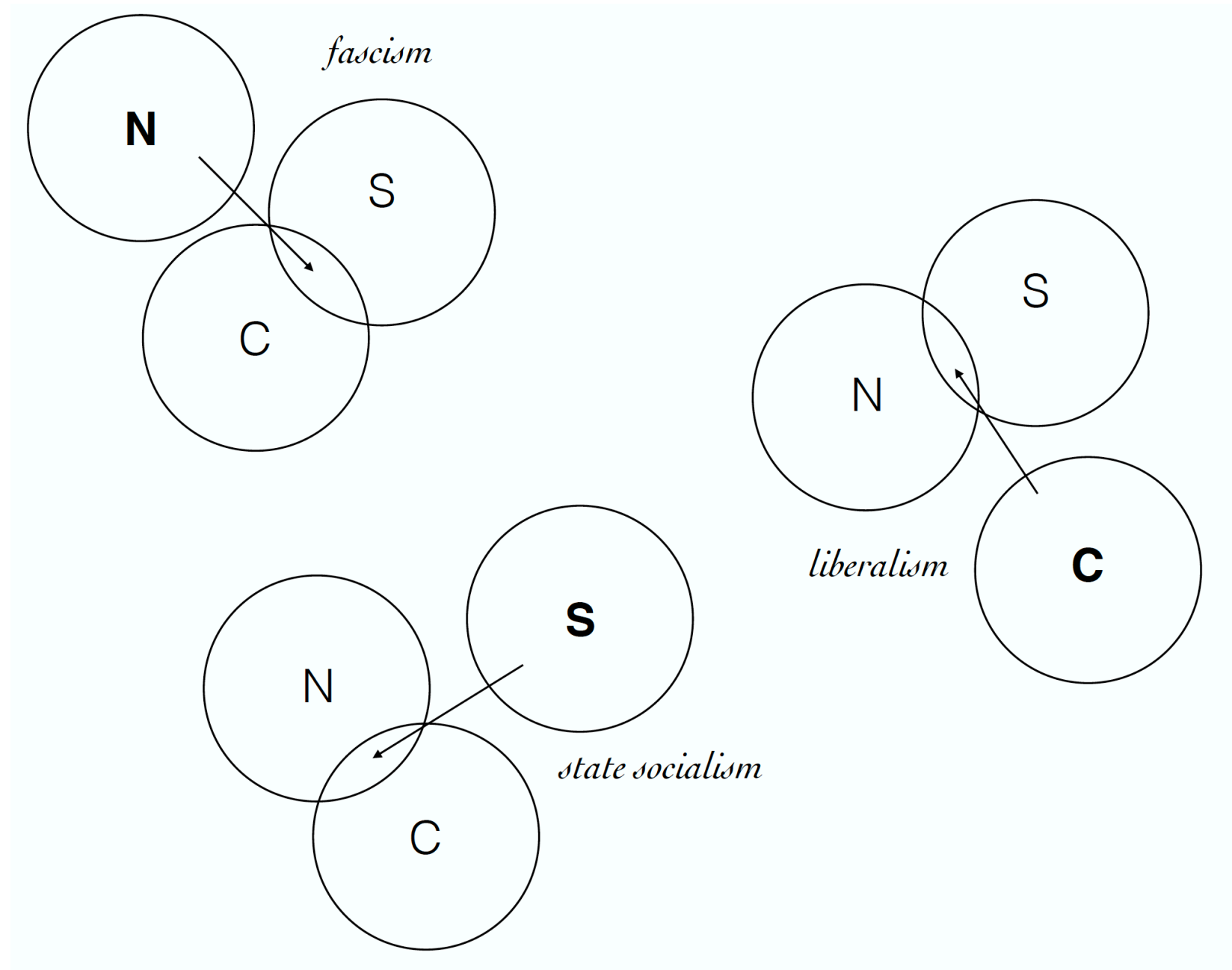
- **Constructive ideas:** state capitalism in Jacobinism, Stalinism and Maoism.
- **Regulative ideas:** has the status of a transcendental illusion and is something we cannot do without. The “X” realized in associationism.

This distinction helps us see why Kant is so central to Karatani’s contribution to communism.

Fascism: the attempt to overcome capital and state by way of the nation. It returns to mode A but in a nostalgic way that reinforces the status quo whereas associationism which is future-oriented and disrupts the status quo because of how it overwhelms mode C.

What is an “act of enlightenment”? —it is the governing of a revolution through reeducation, vanguard party etc. by way of constructive ideas.

Fascism, Liberalism, State Socialism



Morgan's *Ancient Society* gave Marx the impulse for a return to community not as a romantic entity.

- Marx identified the clan society as a community in which autonomous individuals flourished.
- Capitalism offers a replacement community, what Marx calls the “material community” which is required to overcome the human fragmentation that comes with the reduction of individuals to a set of exchanges.

“This is exactly the moment when capital is constituted into community. The fundamental exchange no longer appears as an exchange between living and objectified labour, but is a nutritive exchange between circulating capital, which includes labour power, and fixed capital.” Marx, *Grundrisse*

Mode A for Marx: Community

Marx from the *Grundrisse*:

"Thus capital has become the material community of man. There is no longer any distortion between the social and the economic movements as the latter has completely subordinated the former. We saw how, in the preceding forms, the various communities tried to limit the development of exchange-value, because it undermined their foundations. In capitalism, on the contrary, it is precisely the movement of value which assures the domination of the community. This means that it has become master of the state, men's alienated community, or, if one prefers, attempts to conciliate antagonisms to such a degree that the state no longer appears as the power of a class, since it no longer needs to assure its own domination; ***even the ruling class is dominated.***"

- *Recommended reading: Jacques Camatte, *Capital and Community* (2011)

Karatani's Stages of Capitalism

TABLE 6 The World-Historical Stages of Capitalism

| | 1750–1810 | 1810–1870 | 1870–1930 | 1930–1990 | 1990– |
|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Global Capitalism | Mercantilism | Liberalism | Imperialism | Late capitalism | Neoliberalism |
| Hegemonic State | | Britain | | United States | |
| Economic Policy | Imperialistic | Liberalism | Imperialistic | Liberalism | Imperialistic |
| Capital | Merchant capital | Industrial capital | Finance capital | State-monopoly capital | Multinational capital |
| World Commodity | Textiles | Light industry | Heavy industry | Durable consumer goods | Information |
| State | Absolute monarchy | Nation-state | Imperialism | Welfare state | Regionalism |

Notes:

- This presentation of the stages of capitalism is hugely indebted to Uno's theory of the stages of capitalist development: he brought mode B back into the picture but kept the focus on capital mode C.
- Wallerstein posits a different theory of stages: from mercantile, industrial to financial.
- Arrighi takes the state away but for Karatani the task is to think the state and capital as a double headed being (272).

Neoliberalism is Imperialistic

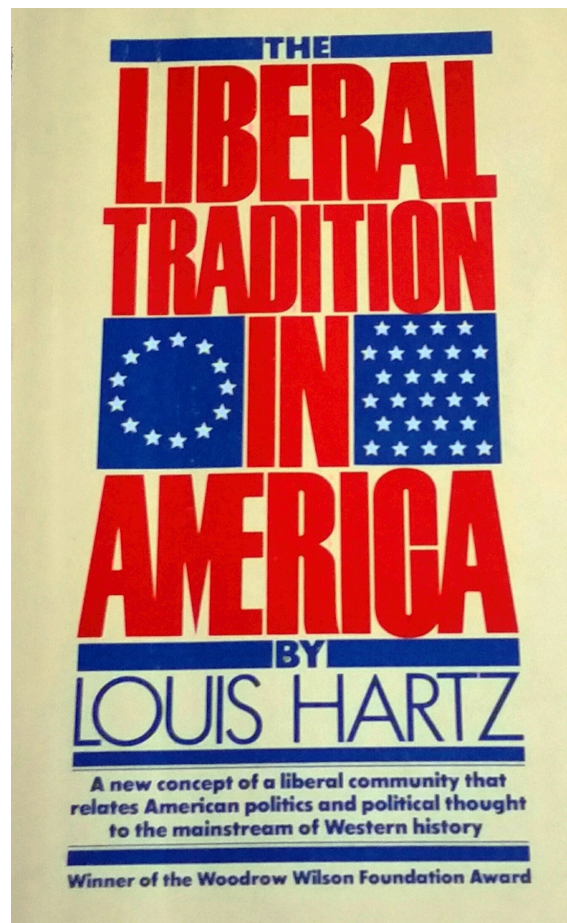
- “In the modern world system, mode C is dominant. Empire is not possible here. Any attempt to build an empire ends up as imperialism. Modern imperialism is not necessarily expansionist in terms of territory. Rather, it aims at expanding trade, or mode C. By way of spreading the market economy into its territory, imperialism tries to gain surplus value. Thus, **‘neoliberalism’ is imperialist by my definition, as by nature it aims at global expansion of the market.**” (271)
- ‘Both Holland and Britain during the period in which they were hegemonic— during, that is, their liberalism period— were domestically characterized by robust social- welfare systems. The United States similarly implemented domestic social-welfare and worker-protection policies from the 1930s as part of its effort to counter the Soviet Union. In that sense, the Cold- War formation can be said to have helped produce liberalism in the United States” (277).

Primary claim: we are in an imperialist stage since 1990 and this differs from the predominant accounts of stages by world systems theory.

On the structure of repetition of the state:

- Why it is impossible for the nation-state to result in empire? Because “the centralized state is born as a negation of the principles of empire” (276).
 - “If a single empire takes the lead in trying to restore empire, the result can only be imperialism” and “the impetus to return to empire does not disappear, even when imperialism is rejected” ... *“This is the form of repetition specific to the dimension of the state—though it is of course inseparable from the movement of global capitalism”* (276).
- **Will a new hegemon arise?** That would require a return to industrial capital accumulation:
 - “First, that nature supply unlimited resources from outside the industrial structure; second, that human nature be available in an unlimited supply outside the capitalist economy; and, third, that technological innovation continue without limit. *These three conditions have been rapidly disappearing since 1990.*” (284)
 - *Neoliberalism is thus have an imperialism unlike prior imperialist stages because accumulation struggles to satisfy these three conditions.

A Theory of American State and Capital Formation



Karatani says in the current stage of neoliberalism, global capitalism is witnessing new forms of Social Darwinism reminiscent of the late 19th century. The logic of neoliberal capitalism is thus "meritocratic capitalism" (Milanovic) whereby the Fordist distributionism model (Rawls) is disintegrating.

The Hartzian School of American History

- **Thesis:** The United States has evolved from mode C, not mode B, as it was not founded on an extant mode B (feudal social relations) but was founded on mode C (bourgeois revolution). This accounts for why socialism has been absent in America.
- As class conflict and antagonisms grew, the ideology of Algerism was introduced to contain the promise of mode C and to mitigate social democracy from emerging in the mid 19th century, as class relations grew more stratified. The ideology of Algerism (meritocratic Protestantism) was introduced.

Features of Algerism:

- Mode B is contained within mode C which kept the promise of negative liberty mode C open.
- The birth of meritocratic capitalism as the solution to the incursion of mode B onto C.
- Algerism ensures the autonomy of mode C.
- An imperial model of US expansion has been founded on this structure and exported abroad in the Cold War.

12: Toward a World Republic

Flaws of countermovement's against capital

Socialism that does not aim to abolish the state is not 'revolutionary' socialism

Revolt at the site of production is inadequate:

- As a praxis it ties labor struggle resistance to the wage and that makes abolition of wage labor impossible. It reinforces social democracy.

Karatani is asking: What kind of resistance is possible under conditions of real subsumption?

No resistance is possible if we limit ourselves to thinking resistance to C along the production process. *We have to grasp capital as a totality.*

"If workers decide to resist capital, they should do so not from the site where this is difficult but rather from the site where they enjoy a dominant position vis a vis capital." (290).

*Note the linkage here to a more positive notion of interpassivity we discussed before.

12: Toward a World Republic

What is unique about the worker is that unlike the serf or the slave – **he consumes.**

Praxis against capital (mode C)

- By focusing on consumption struggles and circulation struggles we include a wider definition of the proletariat – anyone who receives a wage is included.
- Kantian freedom of the subject – since capital forces us to work but not to buy, thus, a consumer struggle retains autonomous freedom of the individual.
- Enables resistance to capitalism to not arbitrarily separate gender and minority struggles with working class struggles
- Circulation struggles also offer an opportunity to create new currencies and credit systems.
- Primary tactic is the boycott. The advantage is that it is legal. It takes two forms: refusal to buy and sell. For the method of the boycott to work, an alternative economy must exist.

Countermovement's against the State (mode B)

- Socialist revolution must be international, and not reinforce the imagined pride of the nation.
- Kantian perpetual peace means a cosmopolitan association without states.
- War perpetuates the establishment of an initial peace among the nations realized as “unsocial sociability” – the cunning of nature, not reason.

Models of World Revolution

- **Kant** – an alternative pact amongst nations (Europe soft power over America realpolitik). Contemporary Kantians remain within mode B-A when they put forward a “distributionist” solution to treating disparities in C. Distribution tethers the community to a negative version of A (plunder and redistribution) and forecloses reciprocity entirely. (**Liberalism**)
- **Hegel** – a singular world empire (America) realizes through the cunning of reason a higher state (**Neoconservatism/Fukuyama**) – End of History
- **Marx** – the multitude establishes a new state through revolution and establishes true democracy (**Hardt and Negri**)
 - Problem (1) The above models of world revolution are reliant on mode B and do not address the base of mode C in exchange.
 - Problem (2) by leaving C unaddressed, imperialism and war remains amongst nations.
- **Solution:** Return to Kant but through the abolition of mode C, not B. (Associationism). The abolition of C leads to the abolition of B and returns to A in a higher form (D).

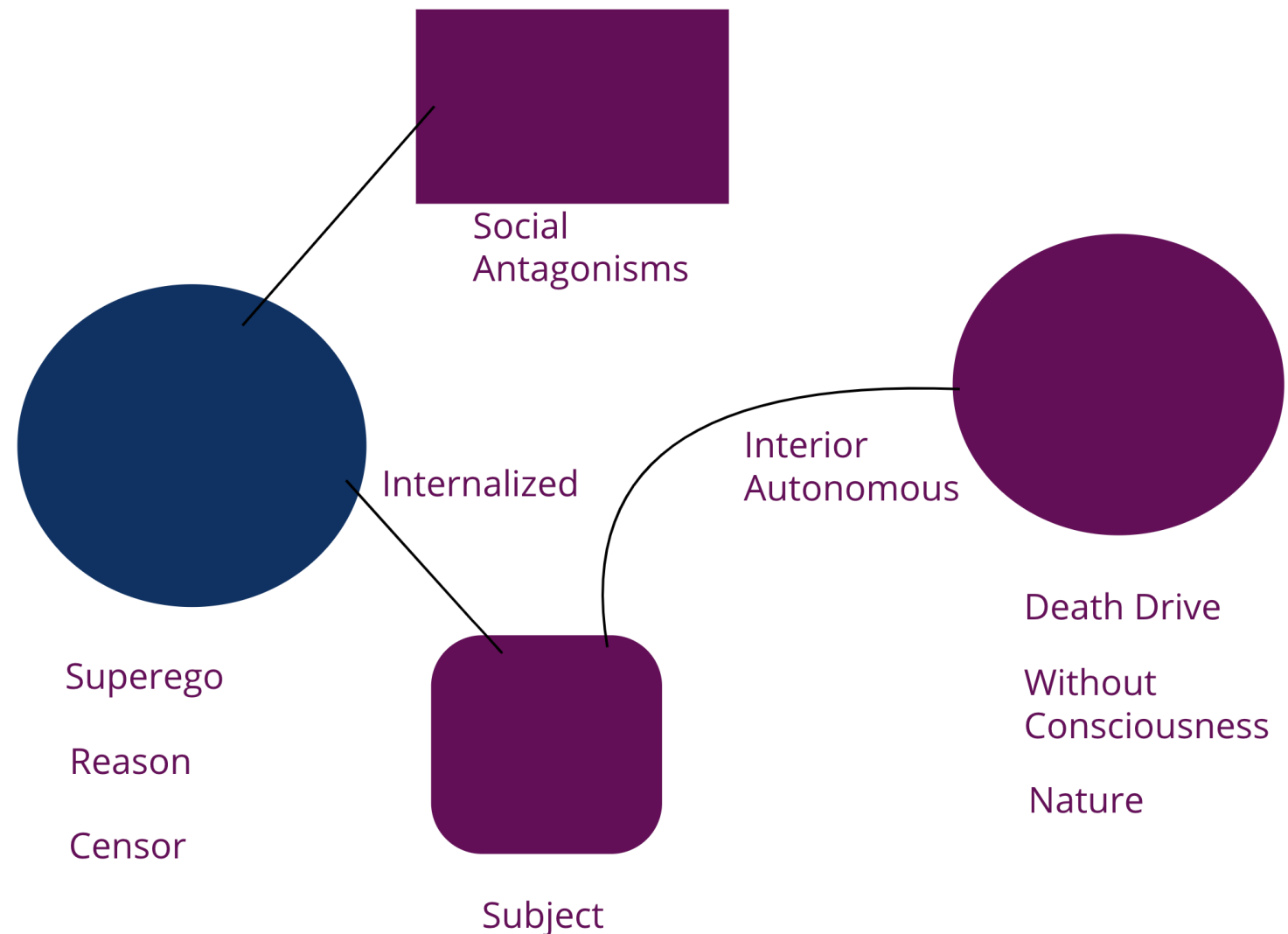
Associationism drives towards a new world system of states centered around reciprocal gift exchange that practice the following tactics:

- Voluntary disarmament of weapons
- Free exchange of production technology
- Abolition of intellectual property restrictions

“The means that nature uses to bring about the development of all of man’s capacities is the antagonism among them in society, as far as in the end this antagonism is the cause of law- governed order in society. In this context, I understand antagonism to mean men’s unsocial sociability, i.e., their tendency to enter into society, combined, however, with a thoroughgoing resistance that constantly threatens to sunder this society. This capacity for social existence is clearly embedded in human nature.”

Kant, *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* (4th Thesis)

Death Drive and Superego



Notes:

For Freud, subjectivity is where there is no consciousness. The theory of drive is thus distinctive from superego (reason) as it presents a form of subjectivity in which consciousness is not present. Superego is an inner aggressivity and it is *autonomous from the death drive*. So death drive is an inner aggressivity that can inhibit outer superegoic aggressivity. Superego is externally directed, not from above. Thinking the superego as external helps us see “how outbursts of aggressiveness can transform into a force for restraining aggression.” The dialectic is between superego (reason) or that which actively and autonomously inhibits desire and the drive – the motor of mode D is drive (non-representational, subjectivity without consciousness, nature).

Mode D

| | | | |
|----------|----------------------------|---|----------------------|
| A | <i>specter of nomadism</i> | restricted pooling blockage of state form from below | compulsive character |
| B | <i>universal religions</i> | formation of communities lateral critique of empires | ambivalent role |
| C | <i>socialism</i> | secular ethics non-communitarian equality international critique of state | scalar limit |
| D | <i>associationism</i> | must allow for larger dissemination must be capable of integrating this space must use, rather than be used by, the other modes | |

Philosophical
Lineage of Mode D:
Lyotard, Bataille,
Klossowski
“Nietzscheanism”

Key themes/motifs

- There is no alterity in gift exchange. Exchange introduces a remainder, an excess that introduces a new outside – this outside becomes the means by which community is formed/confronted, etc.
- The superego always deploys a militarist ethics (Lyotard). The task of libidinal economy is to free intensities entirely (Lyotard’s *Libidinal Economy*) – *there is no dialectic of superego and death drive possible*.
- Klossowski: “living currency” claims there is something beyond commodity exchange that seizes enjoyment, the “phantasm” a libidinal investment that tethers exchange to the jouissance of the body.
- Exchange introduces the problem of masochism (Sade).
- Ressentiment exceeds exchange and leaves a residue (nihilism as a fundamental obstacle of mode D).

Philosophical Lineage of Mode D: Heidegger & Nancy

Key themes/motifs

- Community is founded beyond subject/object: community founded in a radical outside. Community is founded on a common non-belonging and loss, an impossibility of a common good.
- Relation between associationism and “anarchic democracy” (Nancy) – For Nancy, communism-as-ontology is placed in relation to the reign of the reigning capitalist ontology, which operates on a system of exchange and counting, resulting in a notion of ‘universal exchangeability.’ The task of politics consists of “re-opening of the space of its inaugural sharing,” a space of pre-ontological ‘fraternity’ that presents to being a fundamental equality founded in the sharing of the incommensurable itself.
- **The exchange of community is a gift itself:** “a division of tasks that does not divide up a preexisting generality, but rather articulates singularities among themselves.” This community “is not a matter of the Other or Others, but a singular plural that is subsumed by means of its own curiosity about itself, subsumed within a generalized equivalence of all the representations of itself that it gives itself to continue.”
- For Nancy, associationism is an “ontological communism” that challenges the atomized ontology of general equivalence that sustains political capitalism. The association community lacks an essence – it is beyond a worldview constituted by class or identity.