Spaces of critique, spaces of discomfort: A rhizome of shock and unease

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abstract

This paper is an effort to work within a 'rhizome' as described by Deleuze and Guattari (2005 [1987]) as well as critique and an 'ethics of discomfort' as discussed by Michel Foucault (2007 [1978]; 2007 [1979]). It is through these theoretical framings that I will wrestle with the neoliberal underpinning of the 2016 US election in which Donald Trump surprisingly beat Hillary Clinton. While I cannot possibly offer solutions to what many on the left see as a devastating outcome, I will attempt to map the neoliberal spaces of trade and capitalism in a new way. Only through a true critique of the rhizomatic movement of capital, whether labeled neoliberal or neocolonial, can those on the left begin to move forward.

Keywords: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari; Michel Foucault; Donald Trump; Flint, Michigan; NAFTA

Introduction

> All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilized nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. (Marx and Engels, 1978 [1848]: 476)

> This November, the American people will have to choose between an economy that works for everyone and an economy that benefits the well off at the expense of everyone else. The choice couldn't be clearer. (Clinton, 2016)

To borrow a phrase from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, I am sick of trees. I have to agree with these two men when they say, 'We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They've made us suffer too much' (2005 [1987]: 15). Deleuze and Guattari are critiquing the dendritic structure to which academics and professionals cling when working toward the teleological progress of history or economics. Deleuze and Guattari insist upon the rhizome instead, a subterranean root system that spreads out roughly parallel to Earth's surface, with new shoots popping up as needed. This is a way in which we might best get at a multiplicity of

objects, at a plateau of events. Rather than work vertically toward a summit of progress or enlightenment, we should see what happens when we spread horizontally and map the rhizome of our study (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005 [1987]: 12).

I am turning to the rhizome because I found that I could not make sense of certain objects, subjects, and moments despite my being convinced that they were connected. While I suppose the simplest explanation is that they are not actually connected, I cannot let my idea go without first wrestling with it. I am also struck by Deleuze and Guattari when they say that "a plateau is always in the middle, not at the beginning or the end. A rhizome is made of plateaus." (2005 [1987]: 21). In what follows, I want to map the plateaus of Flint, Michigan, the 2016 election of Donald Trump, the 1994 enactment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Marxism, de-colonial theory, and fieldwork. Each plateau is already in progress with no definitive end in sight. I also use the verb 'to map' deliberately as a cartographer, though this spatial work will not take place in a geographic information system. My hypothesis is that when overlaid, these plateaus reveal an intellectual disconnect between what should be understood as connected elections, neoliberal practices, and quotidian existence in the contemporary United States. To grasp these networks is to work toward a critique that might open new possibilities for the left.

While Deleuze and Guattari's influence is clear, I plan to do this work using Michel Foucault as a guide, though an aloof guide who will pop in and out of this project. Specifically, I will use three selections from *The Politics of Truth*, a collection of Foucault's essays and lectures. First, I will use 'What is Enlightenment?' (2007 [1984]) in which Foucault works out an ethics of who we are in the present moment. Next, I will turn to 'What is Critique?' in which he asks how to not be 'governed quite so much' (2007 [1978]: 45). Finally, I will couch all of this in

'For an Ethics of Discomfort' in which Foucault, invoking Maurice Merleau-Ponty, reminds us to 'never consent to being completely comfortable with your own certainties' (2007 [1979]: 127). It is my hope that through this mapping of multiple nodes I can work within a space of discomfort to offer some new ideas about politics and economics in the United States.

Node 1: What the hell happened to Flint, Michigan?

I traveled to Michigan in August 2016. I was there to see my brother who had moved to the state about a decade ago, and because I was traveling alone I could slowly work my way from Detroit to his home in northern Michigan and then in a few days slowly drive back south to catch my return flight to Los Angeles. This is what prompted my 'fieldwork' in Flint.[1] I had no real mission in veering off I-75 other than to drive around Flint to get a sense of what was happening there in that moment. Being a Californian with no ties to Michigan before my brother moved to the state, I did not know about Flint until seeing the 1989 documentary *Roger and Me,* in which director Michael Moore traces the General Motors plant closings and lay-offs that occurred in the 1980s. The film is not flattering to the city, its residents, nor the corporation, and it presents a dualism between auto workers and industrialists. Not only did I have the images of the city produced by *Roger and Me*, but I had years of articles showing that Flint seemed to be in a state of perpetual decay (Streitfeld, 2009). Then, to top it all off, in April 2014, the emergency managers of Flint (appointed by Michigan's governor, not elected by the citizens of Flint) made the decision to switch their water supply from Detroit's system to a delivery system proposed by the Karegnondi Water Authority (KWA) as a cost-cutting move (Bosman and Davey, 2016).

[1]This 'fieldwork' was not actually planned research, but rather a geographer's desire to experience a place first hand. Was life in Flint as bad as it seemed from news media reports?

While waiting for KWA's pipeline to be operational, Flint began to pull water from the Flint River (Dixon, n.d.; also see figure 1). This switch was intended to save money, but it turned into a major environmental crisis that was declared an emergency over a year and half after the water supply was switched.

Figure 1. The Flint River. Photo by the author.

My first stop in the city was to the banks of the Flint River itself. I simply wanted to get out of the car and look at this river that had seemingly caused so much pain and fear in Flint. I did not expect it to be bubbling or exude evil, but I was still surprised at its normal appearance (figure 1).

Harvey has discussed how nature and capital should be thought of as a system rather than two separate entities: 'Capital *is* a working and evolving ecological system within which both

nature and capital are constantly being produced and reproduced' (Harvey, 2014: 247, his emphasis). It was obvious that capital, or I should say a lack of capital, was at least in part to be blamed for Flint's water crisis. The place where I had stopped to look out into the water of the Flint River was in one of many rundown neighborhoods. To my back were over a dozen modest homes, some occupied, but most abandoned. Having lived in Southern California through the Great Recession, I was used to abandoned homes interspersed with those still occupied. The homes would stay dormant for a few months to a year until a buyer would purchase them either to live in, rent, or flip. These Flint homes were different. They were abandoned in the truest sense of the word; capital no longer had any need for them. I was not prepared for this sight. This was not a case of a homeowner having financial trouble, which was then masked by the new injection of money and granite countertops by a new owner. Capital had given up on these homes (figure 2).

Not only were the homes abandoned, but the actual upkeep of the city no longer seemed to be a priority. Weeds and unkempt grass seem to grow everywhere, regardless of whether the home was abandoned or not. While the proliferation of blue wildflowers produced an intriguing affect, one I found pleasant, it was clear that any money still had by the city government was not being used to maintain the city's infrastructure. I stumbled upon the Flint River Trail, which is about twenty-four miles long and was probably a nice way to get around Flint thirty years ago when it was first built (Michigan Trails, n.d.). The trail, like many of the homes appeared abandoned (figure 3). Despite the trees, the bent trail markers and overgrown pathways did not suggest a natural space, but rather a space of decay and neglect. Further, I was beginning to realize just how uncomfortable Flint was making me feel (Shouse, 2005). This space of discomfort was unexpected even though I thought I knew what to expect when I entered the city.

Figure 2. One of the many truly abandoned homes in Flint, Michigan. Photo by the author.

Figure 3. The state of the Flint River Trail. Photo by the author.

I drove around Flint and found more and more abandoned landscapes. While many parts of the city were suffering neglect, I did find one new piece of construction (figure 4). This sign alerted drivers to a water distribution center at a local church. What disturbed me most of all was the fact that the sign was permanently placed. This did not have the ephemerality of a yard sale or even a real estate sign; it was designed to last for a long time. This was the moment when I realized the hopelessness of Flint's water crisis. I found myself asking the Foucauldian question of how we, meaning the United States of America, allowed a once thriving city like Flint to get to its present condition.

Figure 4. The one new object in Flint, Michigan. Photo by the author.

When Flint made the switch from Detroit's supply of water from Lake Huron to the Flint River in 2014, residents complained about the 'water's color, taste and odor… rashes and concerns about bacteria' despite the city's insistence that it was safe to drink (Lin et al., n.d.). The poor quality of the water was downplayed by the emergency government set up to save Flint, though residents were instructed in August 2014 to boil tap water before consuming it due to e-coli and coliform bacteria concerns. This contamination meant that higher levels of chlorine were necessary in the water. It was later revealed that the unelected city officials did not see the need to add 'corrosion-control treatment' which would prevent the corrosive Flint River water from leaching lead, copper, and iron from old pipes and into tap water (Dixon, n.d.). Even General Motors stopped using water from the Flint River in October 2014 because it was

corroding car parts (Lin et al., n.d.). The next year would involve local, state, and federal agencies trying to get a hold of just how bad the water crisis was, while residents worried about their health. While the issue of dangerous lead levels in drinking water and the spread of Legionnaires disease was obviously disconcerting to Flint residents, the fact that government agencies did not appear to care about the health of an entire city was more alarming. Even state officials became concerned with Flint residents' lack of any access to power. Dennis Muchmore, Michigan Governor Rick Snyder's chief of staff, released an email he sent to Nick Lyon, director of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services:

> I am frustrated by the water issue in Flint. I really don't think people are getting the benefit of the doubt. Now they are concerned and rightfully so about the lead level studies they are receive from the [Department of Environmental Quality] samples. Can you take a moment out of your impossible schedule to personally take a look at this? These folks are scared and worried about the health impacts and they are basically getting blown off by us (as a state we're just not sympathizing with their plight). (quoted in Lynch, 2016)

While Muchmore's voluntary release of his email raises questions of his real motives, it does show the frustration felt by many involved in this crisis. Who can be blamed for this?

On November 22, 2016, Jeff Wright, the CEO of the Karegnondi Water Authority (KWA) published a report on KWA's role in the water crisis. The report is hosted on KWA's website and is an emotional response to some of the blame that has been placed on the agency: 'A number of misstatements, half truths, and outright lies have been told about me [Jeff Wright], my office, and KWA. Among the lies, that I am racist, and KWA, is a racist organization' (Wright, 2016: 2). This of course caught my attention after hours of pouring through newspaper articles and sterile government reports. I was even more surprised when I read the following:

> But these basic facts do not interest Professor Hammer. He has an ideologically driven agenda. He tells a rambling and inaccurate tale to support his thesis that Genesee County, the hundreds of others connected with KWA and I racists. He says we may not be intentionally racist, but we are clearly strategically racist. Now if you don't know what a strategic racist is, please read Professor Hammer's explanation of various types of racism at pages 1-5 of his testimony. There he applies Michel Foucault's analysis of knowledge & power, to his newly minted concept - strategic racism. (Wright, 2016: 14).

Michel Foucault was mentioned in a water policy document! He was already present in this rhizome before I began mapping it. I picked up this line and followed it.

The accusations of racism come from Peter Hammer, a law professor at Wayne State University who testified before the Michigan Civil Rights Commission in July 2016. Hammer argues that Flint's water crisis is primarily the result of 'spatial-structural racism' in which institutional structures like education, health, housing, and the environment are geographically circumscribed to reinforce white supremacy (2016: 2). Further, Hammer adds 'strategic racism' to the list of problems facing the predominantly black residents of Flint, which is 'the manipulation of [intentional racism, structural racism, and unconscious biases] regardless of whether the actor has express racist intent, although the [very] act of engaging in strategic racism is itself a form of racist behavior' (2016: 3). Based on this definition, I can understand Wright's emotional critique of Hammer's testimony and paper. Wright is clearly frustrated by the notion that one could be racist and not even be conscious of it (2016: 15). This is the rhizome at work. Wright and Hammer occupy separate plateaus that prevent the dendritic, vertical connections between them. Wright and Hammer are working in the same place yet existing in separate spaces.

Hammer does invoke Foucault, though his use of knowledge and power does not convey a close read of *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* despite its citation in the paper. Rather, Hammer tends to simply add the phrase 'knowledge-&-power' here and there. Hammer's paper is correct in effectively stating that Flint's structural problems are the result of a lack of tax revenue, but in his analysis, he fails to look outside of the state of Michigan and into the uneven capital flows of neocolonial/neoliberal capitalism (2016: 7-9). General Motors is mentioned, yet NAFTA and the off-shoring of manufacturing is not. Instead, Hammer sees the powerful state of

Michigan (powerful because of their knowledge) as withholding both funds and agency from the city of Flint (2016: 8). Hammer, after discussing the lack of funding in poor black communities, asks 'would the same events be possible in a wealthy, predominantly white community?' (2016: 11). Based on his logic thus far, it would appear that the answer is clearly no, because this white community could produce tax revenue. While I do not dispute Hammer's concept of structural racism, I do not feel he proves that an agency like KWA is engaging in such unconscious racism. At a certain point, the abandonment of Flint long proceeded the decision to use the Flint River for drinking water, even if those moments are connected in some way. An effective history of Flint or Michigan in general is needed to get at how this region arrived at its present moment (Foucault, 1977 [1971]). While those initial reasons to abandon the city could likely be the result of uneven development based on racial practice, I see the actions of people like Jeff Wright as trying to make do with an already difficult situation.[2] Hammer did not convince me of strategic racism on the part of KWA.

If Hammer is interested in simply what is happening in Michigan today, there are more interesting movements of capital at work. In my online research, I kept seeing advertisements and links for Nestlé Waters North America that reported how much bottled water they donated to the Flint water crisis.[3] Further research also revealed that Nestlé Waters North America is also currently working to get the state of Michigan's permission to extract more water from

[2] Which is not to say there were not those to blame. Official findings certainly placed legal responsibility. See *Flint Water Advisory Task Force Final Report,* March 2016, https://www.michigan.gov/documents/snyder/FWATF_FINAL_REPORT_21March2016_517805_7.pdf

[3] For example, http://www.nestle-watersna.com/en/water-stewardship/water-conservation/committed-to-michigan?iq_id=100950472-VQ16-c&utm_medium=cpc&utm_source=google&utm_campaign=Corporate_PR_Michigan_Non-Brand_Exact&utm_term=100950472-VQ16-c

Michigan's White Pines Spring (Department of Environmental Quality, 2016). As Harvey says, 'Capital *is* a working and evolving ecological system within which both nature and capital are constantly being produced and reproduced' (2014: 247, his emphasis).

Node 2: The shock and unease of Donald Trump

I want to leave Flint, Michigan for the moment and now focus on the greater United States in 2016. This is a moment of crisis and contradiction for both the base and superstructure. On November 8, 2016, Republican candidate Donald J. Trump beat favored Democrat candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton. Nate Silver and his website FiveThirtyEight.com expected Clinton to win, giving her a 71.4% chance of victory on the day of the election (2016). Months of analyses and opinion leading up to the election by newspapers like the New York Times and the Washington Post did not give any reason to doubt FiveThirtyEight's odds. Yet, early into the election night, it became clear that what was expected to happen would not. In what was quickly labeled the 'biggest political upset in living memory' (The Data Team, 2016), Trump's victory was described as producing 'Shock and Unease' on the front page of the New York Times' website the day after the election.

Even months after the election, I still find myself going between two maps. The first comes from FiveThirtyEight and shows not only the chances of the two most popular candidates, but in which states they will win (figure 5). While some of the former manufacturing belt states were not as 'guaranteed' for Clinton as California or New York, she had a 78.9% chance in Michigan and a 77.0% chance in Pennsylvania. A victory in these crucial states were part of the strategy to ensuring an overall win in the election. Not only was Clinton expected to win the

popular vote by almost four points, it looked like she would have little difficulty in winning the 270 electoral college votes needed to win the presidency.

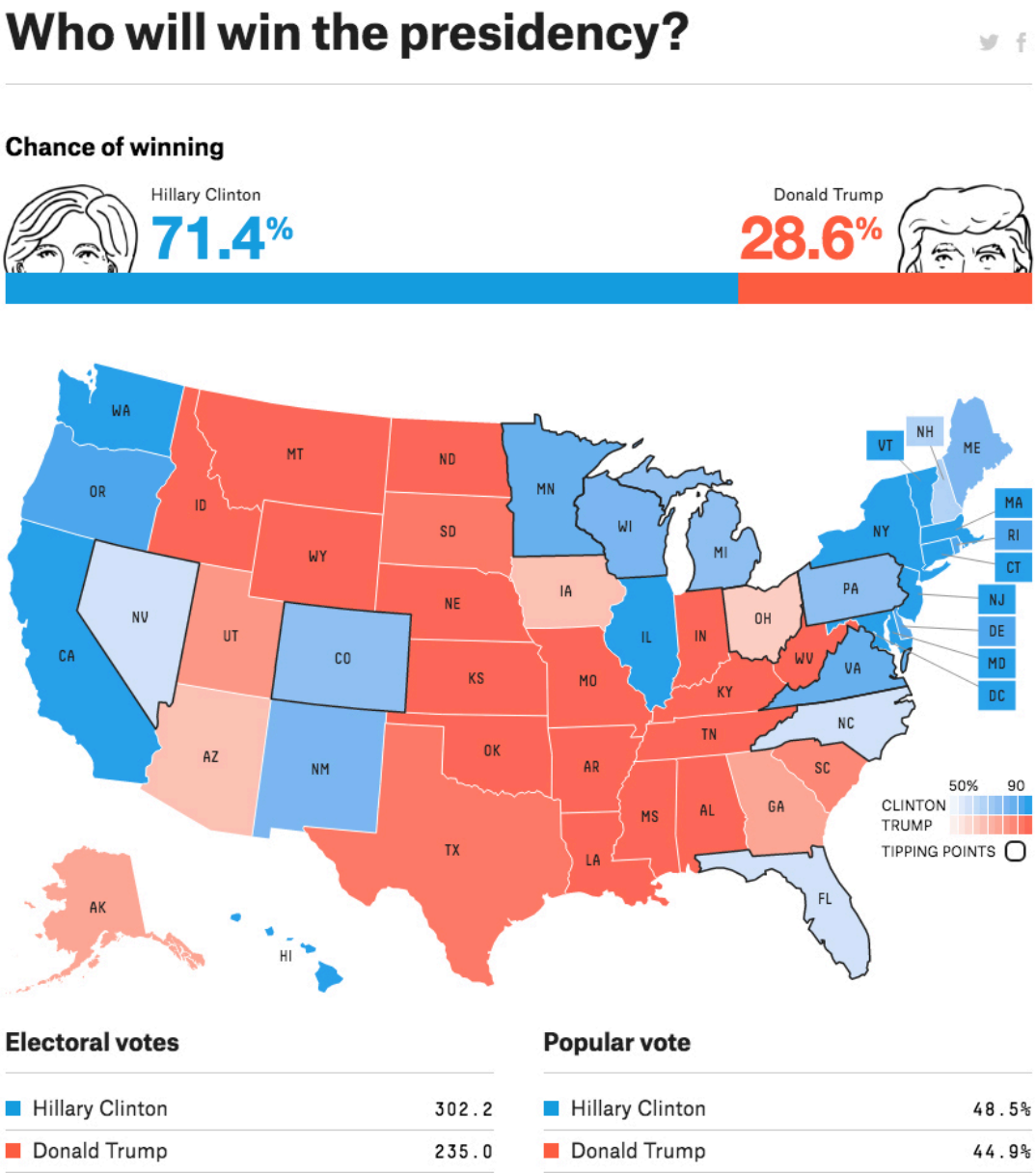

Figure 5. FiveThirtyEight's map showing the chances of winning for Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump.

The second map is from the New York Times that was first posted the day after the election (figure 6). This map, using blue and red arrows, shows how voters shifted voting patterns since the 2012 general election. The sea of red in the Michigan, Pennsylvania, and the rest of the

American Midwest and Northeast is alarming considering what was predicted to happen hours before the close of voting on election day. While Trump did have almost a 30% chance of winning, FiveThirtyEight's successful forecast of the 2008 and 2012 elections made a Trump victory seem remote.

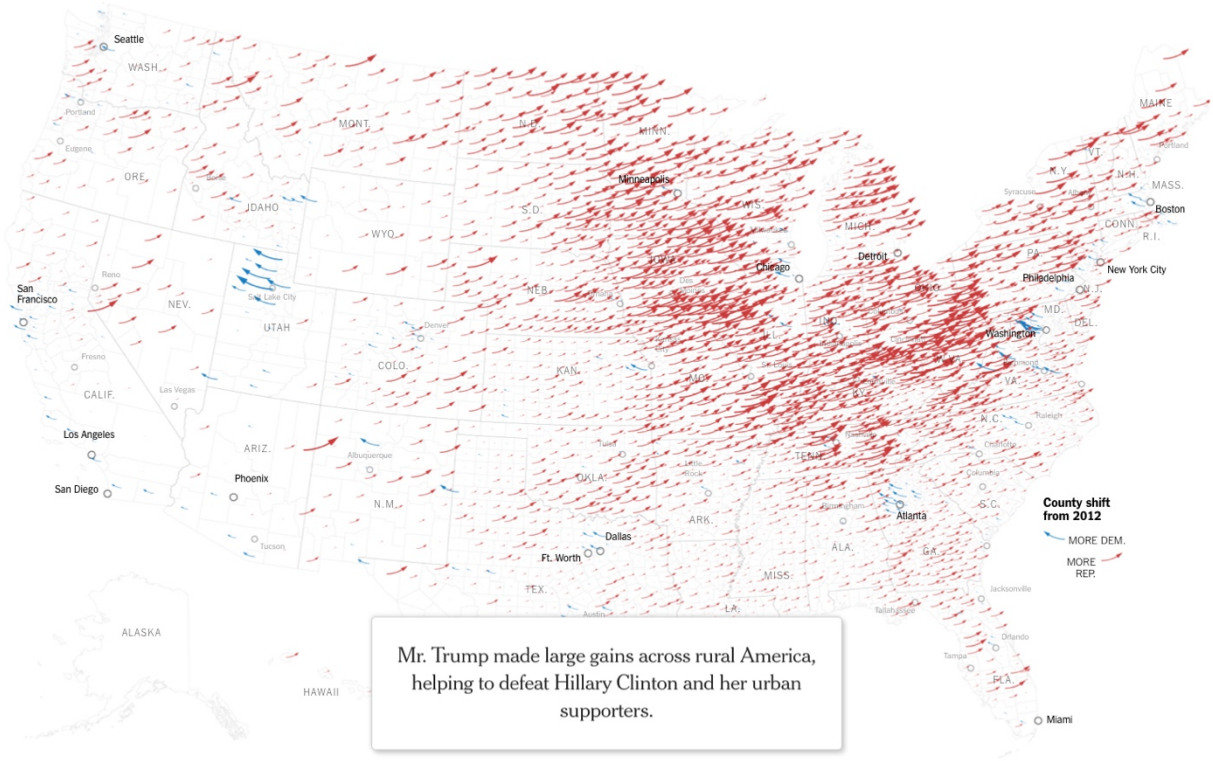

Figure 6. Map from *The New York Times'* website showing how voters shifted either more left or right in the 2016 election from the 2012 election.

I was shocked to see Michigan so red, I think because of the neglect I had experienced that very summer in Flint. Having now personally seen widespread poverty in a place that was once prosperous was a powerful example of Marx's crises of capitalism. Further, Flint's specific problems evoke Harvey's thoughts on the relations between capital and nature (Harvey, 2014: 246-63). To see Flint represented as a red arrow should not have been alarming considering Foucault's presence in water agency documents (see node 1). This is where the rhizome becomes

a useful tool. The overlaying of 'unintentional racism' with voting patterns presents a map unlike any seen leading up to the 2016 US election.

As I looked at this second map (figure 6), I noticed that the densest region of red arrows was in the former American Manufacturing Belt. I thought back to the debates and speeches of the campaign and I kept going to Trump's stance on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA):

> Nafta (sic) is signed by Bill Clinton, perhaps the worst trade deal ever signed in the history of the country. It's the worst trade deal ever signed in the history of this country and one of the worst trade deals ever signed anywhere in the world. Nafta is a disaster… Nafta has drained manufacturing out of New York State, out of Pennsylvania, out of Ohio, out of so many different places. It's drained. And these companies have gone to Mexico, and they've gone, they've left with the jobs. (Trump, 2016)

NAFTA was repeatedly mentioned by Trump, and often attributed to Clinton's husband who signed it into law, despite President George H.W. Bush negotiating the agreement. This brings us to two new nodes, the first dealing with neoliberal (and postmodern) flexible accumulation. David Harvey claims that one of the interesting shifts from Fordism to flexible accumulation is how 'capitalism is becoming ever more tightly organized *through* dispersal, geographical mobility, and flexible response in labor markets, labor processes, and consumer markets, all accompanied by hefty doses of institutional, product, and technological innovation' (Harvey, 1990: 159, his emphasis). While NAFTA became law after the publication of Harvey's *The Conditions of Postmodernity*, it fits precisely within this concept of geographic dispersal and institutional innovation. Further, NAFTA also ties in with Harvey's notions of the state's role in flexible accumulation. Despite the talk of open borders and free trade, government intervention is crucial in ensuring that capital still moves in the national interest (Harvey, 1990: 170). It seems that the logical question then, is to ask if NAFTA is truly the worst trade deal ever signed or if it is acting in American interests. In order to answer that, we should first explore the debate on how capitalism worked at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Node 3: De-colonizing global capitalism

In the 'Introduction' to their edited collection, *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd complicate our understanding of the term transnational as used within the system of global capitalism. Put simply, Lowe and Lloyd's critique of 'transnational' is that the term is used to describe the Global North entering the South through global economic practice, yet rarely does it describe how ideas, events, and practices, move from the South to the North. Rather than explore cultural and political difference around the world, 'Western' Marxists have simply extended the boundaries of the proletariat to include all laborers in the developing world (Lowe and Lloyd, 1997: 3). The global capitalism as theorized by David Harvey is questioned in that his concept of 'flexible accumulation' fails to see the complexity of late twentieth century economies (Harvey, 1990: 121-97). Harvey and others like him 'assume a homogenization of global culture' (Lowe and Lloyd, 1997: 1). This assumption removes any hope of understanding local differences and possible alternatives to a neoliberal economy. To truly adopt a transnational focus would be to see how capital, ideas, and agency flow in both directions across national boundaries.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels turned our gaze towards the global economy in their *Manifesto of the Communist Party*: 'The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere' (1978[1848]: 476). Yet, for Lowe and Lloyd, this nineteenth century global capitalism is different from the one with which they are faced. Lowe and Lloyd 'seek to rethink the older Marxist notion of internationalism in light of the present conjuncture' of how capitalism has been restructured at the end of the twentieth century (1997:

2). A major part of their rethinking is the Eurocentric use and production of theory, that is, 'the automatic assumption that theory emanates from the West and has as its object the untheorized practices of the subaltern, the native, and the non-West, cannot be sustained' (Lowe and Lloyd, 1997: 5). The result, *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, is an effort to reverse the flow of intellectual work as well as strategies to resist what they term 'neo-colonial capitalism' (Lowe and Lloyd, 1997: 1). Rather than follow theory from West to East, Lowe and Lloyd examine how cultural belief and practice can become political when contradictions emerge from localized economic domination. Marxism must be taken from Europe and situated within the local sites of global capitalism: The Export Processing Zones, the Southeast Asian sex industry, Latin American socialist uprisings. Rather than explain capitalist phenomena outside of Europe and the United States through the lens of nineteenth century capitalism, scholars must go to the local level and see how contradictions emerge in situated practices. Through a framing of neocolonial rather than neoliberal spaces of global capitalism, we might begin to see how capital and power flow in both directions across the global north/south divide.

It is worth a re-read of Harvey before I continue. While Lowe and Lloyd call him out by name on the first page, I see both Harvey and Lowe and Lloyd's positions as being complementary. Harvey's interest in the shift from Fordist production methods, those characterized by 'scientific managerial strategies and state intervention' (Harvey, 1990: 129) to flexible accumulation strategies, in which, simply put, geographical sites of production have changed alongside a greater interest in financial capital, does not preclude Lowe and Lloyd's notion that contradictions of capitalism are taking place at the local level with culturally relevant political resistance (Lowe and Lloyd, 1997: 25). Lowe and Lloyd argue for understandings of globalization that 'do not privilege the nation and are not necessarily defined by class

consciousness' (1997: 2). Yet Harvey is calling for the same thing. Despite his dismissal of the radicalness of 'postmodernity' as a global and cultural force, Harvey praises the notion of questioning what Lowe and Lloyd have labeled as 'Western' Marxism (Harvey, 1990: 355; Lowe and Lloyd, 1997:3). Harvey goes so far as to argue that Marxists must be aware of:

> The treatment of difference and 'otherness' not as something to be added on to more fundamental Marxist categories (like class and productive forces), but as something that should be omni-present from the very beginning in any attempt to grasp the dialectics of social change. The importance of recuperating such aspects of social organization as race, gender, religion, within the overall frame of historical materialist enquiry… and class struggle… cannot be overestimated. (Harvey, 1990: 355)

Harvey has already anticipated Lowe and Lloyd's critique of the use of Marxism outside of American and European settings. Despite Harvey's macroeconomic perspective, I do not see that anything in his book has merited the complete abandonment of his understanding of global capitalism.

At this point, one might ask why I would be interested in Lowe and Lloyd's work if Harvey's is perfectly suitable in envisioning global capitalism. Another question might be why all this focus on decades-old theories developed to make sense of the present moment. To answer the first question, I am still drawn to Lowe and Lloyd's focus on the use of a local scale to map spaces of capitalism. Harvey's purpose with *The Conditions of Postmodernity* is to draw attention to events occurring at the global and national level, but equally important is the questioning of how these events effect local, situated practices. Rather than pit one of these theories against the other, I see them working in concert.

As for the idea that we are long past these early concepts of flexible accumulation and neocolonial capitalism, I would argue that it is time to reassess them. My initial thoughts are that with Harvey's focus on capital expanding to new parts of the globe and Lowe and Lloyd's interest in the international division of labor, human geographers and those doing cultural studies

work have overlooked what has been going on in the United States. In an effort to not privilege the nation, scholarship can run the risk of overlooking what is happening between labor and nationalism in Northern Atlantic countries. We must never forget the nodes like Flint, Michigan.

Foucault offers a possibility of an 'attitude of modernity', in which rather than use 'modernity' to reference a specific moment in time, one can use the term to describe an approach to one's present (2007 [1984]: 105). Foucault calls for 'a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of historical era' (2007 [1984]: 109). The usefulness in bringing Foucault into this rhizome (or perhaps, simply finding him already in here as we saw in the first node) is in this notion of critique. Lowe and Lloyd begin a critique of Harvey's critique of transnational capitalism. Foucault would have us continue to critique and to not only make it local, but to make it personal. What happens if we ask:

> in what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints? The point, in brief, is to transform the critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression. (Foucault, 2007 [1984]:113)

Foucault is suggesting that in place of looking for a universal or essential truth, we should look for how we are the products and subjects of our history. Once we trace the emergence of our subjectivity we can begin to resist that subjugation. Rather than use Harvey and Lowe and Lloyd as a fixed moment of truth from the recent past, I am curious to see how their work has subjugated me as a human geographer.

Back to Node 1…

2016		2012	
Trump	84,175	Romney	71,808
Clinton	102,751	Obama	128,978
Third Party	10,715	Third Party	2,956
Total	197,641	Total	203,742

Table 1. General election results from Genesee County, Michigan. Source: Genesee County Clerk's Office.

Table 1 shows election results from the 2016 and 2012 presidential race for Genesee County, Michigan. Flint is the largest city in Genesee county as well as the county seat. To return to the Flint of Michal Moore, the city's economy was not doing well in the late 1980s, but at one moment in time it was seen as a little town that beat the odds to become a major success as the birthplace of General Motors (Crow, 1945). It was even a place that elected Charles S. Mott as mayor in 1912 to prove to the Socialist party that auto workers were not being exploited:

> A Chicago Socialist, Edward J. McGurty, was brought in to conduct the campaign against Mott and teach the Socialist economic concept to Flint so that the people who were coming from all over the country for Flint's relatively high wages could make the astounding discovery that they were being exploited. It is another of those cyclic humors of the years that, in 1957, Mott was to give the University of Chicago $1 million for a building to house a staff concentrating on teaching everybody the economic ABC's. (Young and Quinn, 1963: 51)

Mott was not only a two-time mayor of Flint, but also an automotive executive. In his biography, he is praised for overseeing average wages of 27.25¢ per hour for his employees. This comes to a little over $6 per hour in 2016 which hardly seems worth bragging about, but it was claimed to be the highest rate for workers in the US at the time (Young and Quinn, 1963: 48). This idea of unexploited labor seems a bit far-reaching, but clearly the relationship between General Motors and Flint was a profitable one.

So how does this relate to election data? In the 2012 election, Barack Obama won Genesee County with 63% of the vote. Third party candidates took 1.5% of the vote. To contrast this with 2016, Clinton won 52% and third party candidates increased to 5.4% of the vote. While the democratic candidate still won in Genesee County, the margin of victory in 2016 was much less and there was more interest in political parties outside of the mainstream. These data explain the placement of one of the red arrows on the *New York Times* map (figure 2), but this still does not give a reason for the *existence* of the red arrow. Why did a place that voted for Obama now show so much support for Trump? Further, how did so much of a poor and working-class

community go against the candidate officially supported by labor unions like the United Automobile, Aerospace, and Agricultural Implements Workers of America (Stoll 2016)?

Node 4: What's a Nafta?

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was enacted in January 1994. This accord between Canada, Mexico, and the United States was designed to establish a free trade area which would 'eliminate barriers to trade' between the three nations and ensure 'fair competition' (NAFTA Secretariat, n.d.). The Office of the United States Trade Representative claims that NAFTA has 'unlocked opportunity for millions of Americans by supporting Made-in-America jobs and exports.' Michigan is one of the states that has supposedly 'seen a surge in exports across North American borders.' (Office of the United States Trade Representative, n.d.).

NAFTA has not been the economic boon to the United States' gross domestic product that Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton had envisioned, but it has not been the major destroyer of jobs in the US that critics feared either (Villarreal and Fergusson, 2015). When looking at the US economy at the national level, trade with Canada and Mexico occupies a small percentage, and it can be difficult to extract NAFTA's pros and cons from other increases in trade with countries like China (McBride and Sergie, 2016). This does deter supporters, and one area of change is in North American supply chains. These manufacturing chains, in which parts are made and products are assembled in the most efficient or inexpensive location regardless of national borders, are viewed as key to keeping US companies more competitive in the global marketplace. This is perhaps best seen in the US auto industry. 'US auto parts producers may use inputs and components produced by another NAFTA partner to assemble parts, which are then shipped to another NAFTA country where they are assembled into a vehicle that is sold in any of

the three NAFTA countries' (Villarreal and Fergusson, 2015: 16). This method is described as a 'vertical supply relationship,' (Villarreal and Fergusson, 2015: 15) but that phrase sounds an awful lot like that tree Deleuze and Guattari warned us about. I map, in contrast, this process of manufacture and assembly as a rhizome. Metal, plastic, and rubber move across borders and while one could argue that the finished product is the peak of the tree, we should not fetishize the automobile as being a culmination of progress. Even after a product is assembled and ready to be sold, the hazardous waste remains and continues to move across national borders (Gonzalez, 2011).

Economic data can support our rhizome. US exports within the automotive industry have increased tremendously in the period between 1993 and 2014. For example, exports to Mexico increased by 2,300% while imports only increased by 1,154%. Of course, the $4.8 billion in 2014 exports is tiny compared to the $46.4 billion in imports (Villarreal and Fergusson, 2015: 18). So while one could say that manufacturing today is better than it was twenty years ago, one could also say that viewed over a longer period of time, NAFTA is, at least in part, responsible for a loss of jobs and a wider trade deficit (McBride and Sergie, 2016). Rather than an example of clear economic progress or failure, NAFTA might be best described as a plateau in Deleuze and Guattari's sense of the word. Flint, as a node in our rhizomatic map, perhaps best highlights the local effects of flexible accumulation.

Conclusions

I liked Jeff Wright's response to Peter Hammer's paper when I initially read it. At first I could not understand why it produced the feelings in me that it did (Shouse, 2005), but I think it has to do with critique. Wright was trying to not be 'governed quite so much' by those looking to

assign blame (Foucault, 2007 [1978]: 117). Wright's writing style is unpolished, which I do not say in a negative way. I envision that he sat down at the computer and unleashed his emotional response to being called a racist if for nothing else than to resist what I see as the ironic production of knowledge and power on the part of Hammer. In using Foucauldian terms at will to bolster one's argument, one is actually adapting a strategy of producing what is true and what is false in order to try to grasp power. Some of my discomfort came from siding against what at first glance appeared to be a fellow Foucauldian.

This emotional and unpolished work of Wright takes me to another node, the second one, in which the affect produced by Trump resulted in shock and unease throughout the world. Why would voters (node 1) effected by NAFTA (node 4) choose the self-proclaimed billionaire candidate (node 2)? My cartographic analysis suggests that to vote for Trump was a critique of all the spaces of uncertainty found in communities like Flint, Michigan. To resist the institutions, subjugation, and knowledge that use power is not an easy task. If it were, Foucault would have given us a blueprint toward victory.

Despite the decay happening in Flint, I stumbled upon little pockets of resistance occupying the interstitial spaces between neocolonial/neoliberal capitalism, corrosive water, and strategic racism. Modest homes were freshly painted and the dying grass was at least trimmed. There was still pride for these working-class homes and more than once I saw an American flag on display (figure 7). My first thought was simply, why? Why would those living in a city abandoned by capital still maintain allegiance to a country so enamored with capital? 'Alienation from nature is alienation from our own species' potential. This releases a spirit of revolt in which words like dignity, respect, compassion, caring and loving become revolutionary slogans, while

values of truth and beauty replace the cold calculus of social labor' (Harvey, 2014: 263). Is the flag a revolutionary slogan of dignity?

Figure 7. Dwelling as critique. Photo by the author.

Perhaps our critique of capitalism, politics, and ethics should lie in a ground-truthing of our present. As we acknowledge the 'shock and unease' of a Trump presidency and the injustices of neoliberal capitalism, intellectuals, academics, politicians, resource managers, former auto workers, etc. should seek out a space of discomfort in their own Flint, Michigan—wherever it may be. We need to accept that Foucauldians can abuse power, labor can embrace capitalists, blue shifts to red. We need to accept this reality, but at the same time do the work to get at how we got to our present moment. At that point, we can move past elections that are seen as being lost by a lack of the ground game (Dovere, 2016) and see how elections are lost to a lack of critique.

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