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Person of the Year: Barack Obama, the Joker, Capitalism, and Schizophrenia

for *Hollywood Politics* (ed. Dr. Leah Murray)

How then does one explain the fact that capitalist production is constantly arresting the schizophrenic process and transforming the subject of the process into a confined clinical entity, as though it saw in this process the image of its own death coming from within? Why does it make the schizophrenic into a sick person not only nominally but in reality? Why does it confine its madmen and madwomen instead of seeing in them its own heroes and heroines, its own fulfillment?

—Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*

If 2008 had a person of the year, it had two: Barack Obama on the one hand and Heath Ledger's Joker on the other. Each in his own way was a spectacular image made flesh—the spectacle of hope, change, and progress against that of disaster, dread, and death—and each in his own way embodied his moment. *The Dark Knight*, a cultural sensation, shattered records, including \$67.2 million in a single day, the biggest single-day opening ever; the largest opening weekend, \$150 million; \$100 million in two days, \$200 million in five days, \$300 million in ten days, and \$400 million in 43 days—all records, the last achieved with twice the speed of the previous record holder.ⁱ The film's total gross has now crossed a billion dollars worldwide after its release on DVD and a subsequent re-release in theaters in January 2009.ⁱⁱ For its part, the Obama campaign, aided by an acute awareness of mimetic branding and viral marketing, and fueled by unprecedented use of online fundraising and social networking tools, set its own monetary records throughout the primary and general election season, including \$133 million dollars in the first quarter of 2008 and \$150 million dollars in a single, record-smashing Septemberⁱⁱⁱ that included \$10 million dollars in one night after Sarah Palin's speech at the Republican National Convention.^{iv} In all Obama had millions of donors, with approximately half that number giving less than \$200. Obama's stump speeches regularly drew crowds of 50,000 people or more, with 33.6 million people tuning in to watch a campaign-paid *infomercial* a week before Election Night.^v By the end of the election the Obama campaign had collected 13 million email addresses, a million cell-phone numbers and half a billion dollars from three million people over the Internet, the vast majority in increments of \$100 or less.^{vi} All this, and he won too.

At first glance the sheer fact of this paradox appears ludicrous, but we cannot escape it. It was the power of this juxtaposition that gave Australian artist James Lillis instant fame when he chose to parody Shepard Fairey's iconic HOPE campaign posters (vaguely reminiscent of the iconic "Che" print) with JOKE, a image of the-Joker-as-Obama that circulated quickly on the Internet and is still (as of this writing) available as a T-shirt.^{vii} How can the country that elected Obama on a rhetoric of "hope" and "change" *at the same time* revel so completely in the Joker's pure negativity and aura of death? What can explain the appeal of *The Dark Knight* to countless numbers of Obama supporters, donors, and volunteers, many of whom must have gone from working for the campaign during the day to seeing the film that night? How could any cultural moment be attracted to such polar opposites simultaneously? This chapter will argue, through reference Deleuze and Guattari's category of the schizophrenic, that despite their surface differences the Obama campaign and *The Dark Knight*'s Joker in fact drew their tremendous popular appeal from a common source: a projected desire for a revolutionary reconfiguration of the conditions of life in twenty-first century American capitalism.

SECRET IDENTITIES AND MISSING BIRTH CERTIFICATES

Almost two decades ago, in *Super Heroes: A Modern Mythology*, Richard Reynolds noted the essential passivity of all superheroes, who take on the role of foil or antagonist against the active engine of plot in their stories, the figure who formally speaking is the protagonist: the villain.^{viii} This has never been more true than in *The Dark Knight*. Naturally, Batman is the nominal hero of this film, but in this, more than any other film in the franchise—befitting the first movie in the series to forgo his name in its title—he is neither the film's star nor its object of primary interest. Indeed at times he is something of an afterthought to a war of wills between the Joker and Harvey Dent, able to be returned to a place of honor in his own franchise at the end of the film only because Dent has the bad luck to be half-doused in gasoline.

This is the Joker's film, and had been ever since its predecessor (*Batman Begins* [2005]) ended with its tease of the Joker's "calling card." The Joker is whom we have come to see, the Joker what we have been waiting for, the Joker who generates nearly all of the pleasure of the film. So we must be careful to resist readings of *The Dark Knight* as an uncomplicated, one-to-one mapping of the major players in the War on Terror into comic-book terms. That is to say that the Joker is not best understood as "a terrorist," though characters in the film call him such repeatedly. The wishful thinking of some right-wing commentators aside,^{ix} the film is not a grand apologia for the Bush presidency, despite the presence of torture and fanciful domestic spying subplots and its apparent Jack Bauer ethos of legal exceptionalism. It is, instead, a kind of macabre pageant, a celebration of the violent revolutionary excess of the Joker himself that is legitimized by the disciplining presence of Batman—delight in destruction made ideologically safe because it is (a) not "real" and (b) eventually (if nominally) "punished."

More so than even Jack Nicholson's turn in the iconic 1989 Tim Burton film, this is a film that lives and dies by Heath Ledger's performance. The film's advertisers were surely aware of this when they crafted the "Why So Serious?" viral advertising campaign dedicated to his performance, as well as the various Alternate Reality Games and online promotions crafted towards uncovering images that tease the Joker. This is why the

frenzy of media speculation that greeted Ledger's death immediately translated into free advertising for the film.

However, the lingering aura of Ledger's death has a consequence: it significantly deforms the audience's ability to read this film correctly. That Ledger died just after filming—that initial reports blamed *the role itself* for his (as it turned out, incorrectly assumed) “suicide”—in some ways threatens to transform *The Dark Knight* into a kind of snuff film. As an unnamed “studio insider” told *Variety* after news of the actor's death broke:

“The Joker character is dealing with chaos and life and death and a lot of dark themes,” one insider with knowledge of the campaign said. “Everyone is going to interpret every line out of his mouth in a different way now.”^x

It was in this context that early media reports in the wake of Ledger's death inevitably turned to a cryptic statement from Jack Nicholson, the Joker in Tim Burton's 1989 *Batman*: “I warned him.”^{xi} Or, as David Denby put this point in his review of the film in *The New Yorker*:

When Ledger wields a knife, he is thoroughly terrifying (do not, despite the PG-13 rating, bring the children), and, as you're watching him, you can't help wondering—in a response that admittedly lies outside film criticism—how badly he messed himself up in order to play the role this way. His performance is a heroic, unsettling final act: this young actor looked into the abyss.^{xii}

This question—which Denby “can't help wondering,” which dominated both public and critical reception of the film—is precisely the question that *we are not supposed to be able to ask of the Joker*. The film is quite clear that the Joker has no history, and can have no history. This is why he tells multiple versions of the story of how he got his scars depending on whom he hopes to terrify, and if the point isn't clear Jim Gordon is sure to drive it home: “Nothing. No matches on prints, DNA, dental. Clothing is custom, no labels. Nothing in his pockets but knives and lint. No name, no other alias...” The Joker's violence cannot be located in an identity or a personal subjectivity. It must originate from and out of nothing, *out of the shadows of Gotham itself*; that is the entire point.

Precisely the opposite could be said of Bruce Wayne, who is *all* history—who builds his own assemblage of gadgets, disguise, gravelly voice, and affectless persona precisely because his father and mother were murdered in Crime Alley, whose entire life grows out of and *is* a (frankly insane) response to that singular event. But it is true of Batman; like the Joker himself, Batman appears suddenly as an irruptive force of no apparent origin, without history or explanation, that disrupts the ordinary flows of mafia capital in Gotham City. Batman, too, must necessarily have no history: to locate even a shred of history in Batman, as the Joker does regarding his relationship with Rachel Dawes, is to cripple him almost beyond repair.

To link the Joker to Heath Ledger's death, therefore, does devastating interpretive violence to the figure of the Joker as such; it is an attempt to inject with history something that has no history, that is frightening and terrifying but also liberatory and powerful—“out-of-control” in both its senses—precisely because it has no past, no desires, no agenda, and no future. It is an attempt to make sense out of what is insensible, what is multiple, what is (in Deleuzian terms) purely schizophrenic:

The schizo has his own system of co-ordinates for situating himself at his disposal, because, first of all, he has at his disposal his very own recording code,

which does not coincide with the social code, or coincides with it only in order to parody it. The code of delirium or of desire proves to have an extraordinary fluidity. It might be said that the schizophrenic passes from one code to the other, that he deliberately scrambles all the codes, by quickly shifting from one to another, according to the questions asked him, never giving the same explanation from one day to the next, never invoking the same genealogy, never recording the same event in the same way. When he is more or less forced into it and is not in a touchy mood, he may even accept the banal Oedipal code, so long as he can stuff it full of all the disjunctions that this code was designed to eliminate.^{xiii}

This question of history is similarly inescapable with regard to Barack Obama, who has managed to draw such a superfluity of history to himself that one hardly knows where to begin. He has positioned himself variously as a kind of self-conscious oedipus seeking a lost father—*Dreams of My Father*—and as the voice of a “new generation” he predates by ten to twenty years, as a reformer/revolutionary, a reconciler, and also as the fulfillment-through-return of a particular sort of American greatness. He even possesses in his own way a kind of doubled identity—the Barry he grew up as becomes “Barack” in adulthood, who in turn becomes the hidden truth behind a opaque public image [“Barack Obama”] which has no history, which is widely perceived to have come out of nowhere, almost to have sprung suddenly into existence on the second night of the Democratic National Convention in 2004. Obama, too, came from nowhere, irrupting on the scene to impossibly defeat the best-known establishment figures in both political parties, first the Clintons, then the Bush and McCain—winning both the primary and the election despite his youth, his race, his relative lack of name recognition, his comparative inexperience, and his surface similarities to the “latte-sipping, arugula-eating” Northeastern liberals who had lost in 1980 (Kennedy to Carter), 1988 (Dukakis to Bush), and 2004 (Kerry to Bush II).

Accordingly, the greatest threats to Obama’s political viability came in attempts to linking the meteoric Candidate Obama to some real, flawed person, for instance the man who had attended Rev. Jeremiah Wright’s church, or the man who once lived in the same neighborhood as former Weather Underground leader Bill Ayers. Even now, a significant portion of the right wing has invested itself in the so-called “birther” movement, which denies the reality of Obama’s citizenship and insists instead that he was actually born in Kenya. These are all hyperbolic, if futile, efforts to locate Obama’s “true” past, his “real” history—his secret identity—and thereby depower him. That there exist no photographs of Candidate Obama smoking cigarettes during the long 2008 campaign, despite his quiet admission that he did so, is proof enough of the power of his carefully honed public mask, beneath which we can never see.

Like Batman, like the Joker, Barack the man has been overwritten completely, overcoded by Barack the Utopian fantasy of a break with history. Here, it was break from both eight long years of Bushism and from the troubled racial history of the nation itself, in particular as the sudden and unexpected fulfillment of Martin Luther King’s longed-for dream—which, we were soberly assured by media figures on both Election Night and Inauguration Day, turns out to have been specifically and exclusively about the presidency all along.

‘CHANGE’

The Joker’s parodic self-representation of his own history—“Wanna know how I got these scars?”—is only the most salient example of his schizophrenic powers of complication and recombination. What the Joker seeks to do—all he seeks to do—is break down codes:

TWO-FACE

It was your men, your plan!

THE JOKER

Do I really look like a guy with a plan? You know what I am? I’m a dog chasing cars. I wouldn’t know what to do with one if I caught it. You know, I just... do things. The mob has plans, the cops have plans, Gordon’s got plans. You know, they’re schemers. Schemers trying to control their little worlds. I’m not a schemer. I try to show the schemers how pathetic their attempts to control things really are.

This is as political as the Joker gets, and as expected it is an apolitics of pure negation, an insistent rejection of all status quos. The Joker decenters, he decodes, he disrupts flows. He queers all hierarchies and subverts all norms. He swaps hostages for hostage-takers, school buses for getaway cars, recodes scotch as poison and police protection as death, scrambles the map of the city, turns a DA into a killer, creates a network of Joker acolytes to rob a bank and then murders them, gathers all the capital of Gotham’s mafia-corruption complex to himself and then burns it. Consider his various remappings of the dead man’s switch—to kill him kills you, *or* to do nothing kills, *or* saves some *and* kills others, except when he decides to blow the switch anyway, *or* when the locations have been switched, *or, or, or*. There is nothing to hold onto with the Joker—he deterritorializes everything, even the terms of his own murderous games. His violence is deeply and inescapably recombinative—it is never the same thing twice, and we are never the same afterwards.

What does it mean, then, for us to *like* the Joker, to indeed *prefer* the Joker to either Batman or Dent or anybody else in the film? What does it say that we do not *care* that he kills Rachel, Bruce Wayne’s barely-there love interest, that he corrupts the already-doomed-by-sixty-years-of-comics-canon Harvey Dent for our amusement? What are we to make of the Joker’s undeniable appeal? This is a film that draws its power not from the repetitious narrative staging of hero vs. villain—a manifest staging that the audience, on the level of the latent, rejects—but from the audience’s delight in pure, anarchistic violence. This is divine violence, to borrow Walter Benjamin’s term from his “Critique of Violence” (1920): messianic violence that does not found or preserve the law but overturns it.^{xiv}

So, to rephrase the question, what does it mean to (in this sense) *approve* of the Joker? To root for him? To see his “point,” such as it is? Because, I think, we do. When we retheorize the film around the Joker we recognize that he is in every sense its creative engine, its vital force. Thinking in Deleuzean terms, the Joker is the film’s embodiment of the unstoppable creative force of the nomadic war machine of *A Thousand Plateaus*—even, as one of his henchmen describes, wearing not makeup but “war paint.” And it was this drive towards disruption that was the barely sublimated subtext of Campaign 2008, not just in Obama’s slogan of CHANGE but in McCain’s counter-meme of MAVERICK—the gambling anti-hero, the hotshot fighter pilot who doesn’t play by the

rules. Even the planned title for the autobiography of ex-Governor Sarah Palin, McCain's vice-presidential candidate, suggests the continued appeal of the Joker's vital force: *Going Rogue*.

The Joker seeks to disrupt a system of overlapping codes, flows, and conventions that is often unjust, inequitable, stultifying and suspect—and while naturally we must disapprove of his *methods* we must admit there is something of a revolutionary Utopian impulse in him that we can surely *recognize*, if not exactly admire. The Joker, when all is said and done, wants CHANGE too. And does that not suggest the possibility that we too might be Jokerized, that there is something essential about the Joker we dare not see lost?

Near the end of the film, dangling upside down the Joker says to Batman: "I think you and I are destined to do this forever." (Note how the camera slowly adjusts itself to his positionality in this moment, against "absolute gravity", suggesting both the Joker's thematic centrality and his essential weightlessness.) And of course they are. We see that in this film, unlike 1989's, the Joker cannot be killed: this time Batman—that is to say, Bruce Wayne, über-capitalist, master of the reterritorializing power of capitalism who has remade himself so entirely—must *save* the Joker in his fall off the skyscraper. Without the Joker Batman is obsolete, as he is already obsolete when the film begins. This time, we find, he (and we) need the Joker to live. Batman's productive powers as the defender of the Gotham City status quo stand in the same relation to the Joker as capitalism does to schizophrenia; the Joker can never be killed because he provokes, and embodies, Batman's own creative excess.^{xv} In this way the Joker is the truth of the Batman; he is Batman's exterior limit, that line towards which he is continually drawn towards and perpetually—structurally—unable to resist. The Joker is the force that gives Batman life. Without the Joker Batman is essentially self-negating; he defeats the mobsters, ends corruption, and then hangs up his cowl and gadgets, totally supplanted. Without the Joker, that is to say, Batman exhausts himself. It is only through the schizo-flows generated by the Joker and the other supervillains who will infest Gotham in sequel after sequel (and comic after comic) that Batman's creativity and heroism can be continually reborn and revitalized—that Batman himself can continue to exist. Batman is indeed only as good as his villain, and they do, in fact, need each other—the Joker to push the limit and the Batman to recoil/chase/follow.

There is a lesson here for Barack Obama, or really for the supporters who have created an image of him in their minds as a kind of redeemer superhero. The disruptive drive for CHANGE—the Joker's drive—was the recombinative schizo-fuel both for Obama's campaign and his immense popularity. It is what allowed him to build that unprecedented, multifaceted network of dedicated and industrious volunteers, allowed him to channel new media technologies to handily beat better-known establishment figures in both parties. CHANGE was the fuel that drove those six million donations, that launched a thousand blogs, and that made 2008's historic election and 2009's equally historic inauguration possible.

That CHANGE is a highly adaptive buzzword meaning nothing and everything briefly fed the fantasy that 52% of the country now agreed on some soon-to-be-enacted radical program of change—but now we know better. This is to say that Obama achieved the presidency through a largely content-free, Joker-like demand that the applecart be overturned and the flows of our own military-industrial-mafia-corruption complex be

disrupted, and that this demand has, paradoxically, catapulted him to a Batman-like office where his job is to *preserve*, not disrupt, capital's flows.

‘SOCIALISM’

In summer 2009, only a few months after Barack Obama's inauguration, a digitally altered image of Obama began to appear as graffiti on overpass walls, first in Los Angeles and then in other major American cities, including Boston and Atlanta. The striking image, drawn from an October 23, 2008, *Time* magazine cover, depicts a snarling Obama made up as Ledger's Joker, with heavily made-up white skin, green hair, heavy eye shadow, and scarred cheeks highlighted by wildly excessive red lipstick. The image was created with Photoshop in January 2009 by a twenty-year old Chicago art student, Firas Alkhateeb, and had sat in digital obscurity on the storage site Flickr^{xvi} until borrowed by an unknown party and repurposed for protest against Obama administration policies. The artifacts of the original *Time* magazine context were digitally stripped away, leaving only the doctored image of Obama, and below the portrait was added a one-word caption suggesting the field of this supposed Obama-Joker equivalence: SOCIALISM.

The reaction to the Obama-as-Joker image was immediate, with wide discussion on political blogs in both the left and right corners of the blogosphere trickling upwards into discussion on talk radio and television. The image was adopted by members of the Tea Party movement and appeared at related protests throughout the summer, appearing on protest signs at health-care-reform “town halls” and the “9/12 Movement” protest on the Mall in Washington, D.C., which had been spearheaded by prominent conservative talking-head Glenn Beck and heavily promoted by the Fox News Channel. At the same time the image was pilloried by liberals and the left, which found itself perplexed by the hyperbolic caption—Isn't Obama clearly governing as a centrist? Isn't the Joker more of a radical Libertarian?—and disturbed by the racial connotations of the whiteface makeup. In a *Washington Post* editorial, Philip Kennicott argued that the image's evocation of Ledger's Joker was calculated to suggest an ideological stereotype of violent, black urbanity that (the artist's apparent argument goes) is quite literally coded in Obama's genes. These racial and perhaps racist connotations were likewise noted by a blogger who helped catapult the image to national prominence, Steven Mikulan at LAWeekly.com, who drew attention to the whiteface makeup's photo-negative reflection of blackface minstrelsy and concluded “The only thing missing is a noose.”^{xvii}

But the provenance of the image suggests something besides race is also at work. In an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*—the news outlet that finally tracked him down—Alkhateeb describes himself as neither a Democrat nor a Republican, and admits that while he didn't vote in November, if he *had* voted it would have been for Ohio's Dennis Kucinich, widely understood as the Democratic primary candidate furthest to the left.^{xviii} In one interview, Alkhateeb expressed an ambivalence about the SOCIALISM caption not readily admitted by partisans on the left: “It really doesn't make any sense to me at all,” he said. “To accuse him of being a socialist is really ... immature. First of all, who said being a socialist is evil?” For Alkhateeb, it seems, Obama's bait-and-switch was not SOCIALISM at all, but rather the short-lived paucity of CHANGE.

But such attempts to engage the anonymous poster as if it were making some earnest political claim only draw us deeper into its trap. No matter what you throw at it,

the poster has but one reply: “Why So Serious?” Like the spectacle of the “tea parties,” like the chaotic disruptions at health-care town halls, like Rep. Joe Wilson’s unprecedented heckling of the president during a televised address to Congress, like any prank, the poster has no real argumentative content. A prank doesn’t *mean* anything; it just disrupts.

The right, it seems, may have learned the lessons of Campaign 2008 better than the left.

There was always something of the Joker’s revolutionary mania lurking just beneath Obama’s campaign appeals, a schizophrenic drive to scramble the system as it currently exists. And it is only this Utopian impulse towards the ecstasy of disruption that can fuel a successful Obama presidency—whether you call it CHANGE, SOCIALISM, JOKE, or whatever else you like. It is not surprising that Obama’s sky-high approval numbers have sharply dipped since his inauguration; it is Obama himself who has returned to Earth as his ambition, his taste for CHANGE, has been tempered by the duties of the office he now holds. There is only one way for Obama to retain his vitality and his creative energy as a political actor—to remain in his own way, if you’ll forgive me, Batmanesque. He must let himself dance with the Joker, pushing on and being pushed by the limits of CHANGE. He cannot grow complacent; he will have to, in the Joker’s words, let a little chaos in. And to the extent that he cannot, to the extent that *any* person in his position will necessarily become the champion not of change but of continuity, it will be up to those who supported him—those who are psychologically invested in Obama’s success but who at the same time want to see the flows at last disrupted and the old codes finally overturned, who want in the end CHANGE (whatever that means)—to reassert their impossible demand for a Utopian break from history, to push the limits, to resist the schemers, to Jokerize themselves in opposition.

ⁱ “IMDb: The Dark Knight,” Internet Movie Database, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0468569/faq>, Accessed 26 January 26, 2009.

ⁱⁱ “Box Office Mojo: The Dark Knight,” Box Office Mojo, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=darkknight.htm>, Accessed 26 January 2009.

ⁱⁱⁱ Christopher Cooper, “Obama Takes in a Record \$150 Million, But McCain Narrows Gap in Some Polls,” *WSJ.com*, 20 October 2008, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122441294251948009.html?mod=googlenews_wsj, Accessed 12 August 2009.

^{iv} Nico Pitney, “Obama Raises \$10 Million After Palin Speech,” *HuffingtonPost.com*, 4 September 2008, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/09/04/obama-raises-8-million-af_n_124023.html, Accessed 12 August 2009.

^v David Baader, “Barack Obama Informercial Ratings: 33.6 Million Watched Across All Networks,” *HuffingtonPost.com*, 30 October 2008, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/10/30/barack-obama-infomercial_n_139263.html, Accessed 12 August 2009.

^{vi} Jose Antonio Vargas, "Obama Raised Half a Billion Online," *WashingtonPost.com*, 20 November 2009,

http://voices.washingtonpost.com/44/2008/11/20/obama_raised_half_a_billion_on.htm, Accessed 26 January 2009.

^{vii} See, for instance, an interview with Lillis at Lewis Wallace, "Dark Knight Fan Cooks Up 'Audacity of Joke,'" *Wired.com*, 4 November 2008,

<http://www.wired.com/underwire/2008/11/dark-knight-fan/>, Accessed 5 October 2009.

^{viii} Richard Reynolds, *Super Heroes: A Modern Mythology*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1992, 50-52.

^{ix} See, for instance, Andrew Klaven, "What Bush and Batman Have in Common,"

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^x Diane Garrett, "Heath Ledger Dies at 28," *Variety.com*, 22 January 2008,

<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117979502.html?categoryid=1236&cs=1>, Accessed 12 August 2009.

^{xi} Joe Neumaier, "Jack Nicholson warned Heath Ledger on 'Joker' role."

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<[http://www.nydailynews.com/news/2008/01/24/2008-01-](http://www.nydailynews.com/news/2008/01/24/2008-01-24_jack_nicholson_warned_heath_ledger_on_jo.html)

[24_jack_nicholson_warned_heath_ledger_on_jo.html](http://www.nydailynews.com/news/2008/01/24/2008-01-24_jack_nicholson_warned_heath_ledger_on_jo.html)>

"Jack Nicholson Says He 'Warned' Heath Ledger." *FoxNews.com*. 24 January 2008. Last accessed 26 January 2009. <<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,325208,00.html>>

^{xii} David Denby, "Past Shock," *NewYorker.com*, 21 July 2008,

http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/cinema/2008/07/21/080721crici_cinema_denby, Accessed 12 August 2009.

^{xiii} Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977, 15.

^{xiv} See Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," Trans. Peter Demetz and Edmund Jephcott, republished in *On Violence: A Reader*, Ed. Bruce B. Lawrence and Aisha Karim, Durham: Duke University Press, 2007: 282-285. "If mythical violence is law-making, divine violence is law-destroying; if the former sets boundaries, the latter boundlessly destroys them; if mythical violence brings at once guilt and retribution, divine power only expiates; if the former threatens, the latter strikes; if the former is bloody, the latter is lethal without spilling blood."

^{xv} See Deleuze and Guattari 1977, 34: "What we are really trying to say is that capitalism, through its process of production, produces an awesome schizophrenic accumulation of energy or charge, against which it brings all its vast powers of repression to bear, but which nonetheless continues to act as capitalism's limit."

^{xvi} The original image is still available at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/khateeb88/>.

^{xvii} Steven Mikulan, "New Anti-Obama 'Joker' Poster," *LAWeekly.com*, 3 Aug. 2009, <http://blogs.laweekly.com/ladaily/politics/new-anti-obama-joker-poster/index.php>. A followup post on Aug. 13 (<http://blogs.laweekly.com/ladaily/community/obama-poster-all-about-race/>) contextualizes his claim of racial appeal alongside the various racist email forwards and talk-radio parodies popularized by opponents of Obama since the election. Another early commenter on the image was Jonathan Jerald of *BedlamMagazine.com*, who notes the image's "malicious, racist, Jim Crow quality."

Jonathan Jerald, "Mystery Obama/Joker Poster Appears in L.A.," *BedlamMagazine.com*, 25 April 2009, <http://bedlammagazine.com/06news/mystery-obamajoker-poster-appears-la>.

^{xviii} Mark Millian, "Obama Joker artist unmasked: A fellow Chicagoan," *LA Times.com*, 17 Aug. 2009, <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/washington/2009/08/obama-joker-artist.html>.

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