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The Devil as Cognitive Mapping

Omar Lizardo

In this essay I show how the Devil has and continues to be one of the most pervasive symbols of the workings of capitalism and its historical penetration into communal and everyday life. First, I briefly sketch the historical transformations in popular and literary images of the Devil throughout post-medieval Western history, connecting these to specific historical transformations of capitalism as a historical social system. Second, I draw on Michael Taussig's work on the role of metonymic symbols in the social representation of capitalist practices and on Fredric Jameson's notion of cognitive mapping to show how we can conceive of the repeatedly observed appeal of the figure of the Devil in those terms. Finally, I examine recent representations of the Devil in Hollywood film to show that the Devil continues to be an intuitive symbolic resource to "map" the global, consumer-based capitalist system in late modernity.

Key Words: Devil, Cognitive Mapping, Commodity Fetishism, Capitalism, Fredric Jameson

In this paper I argue that certain symbolic modifications of the figure of the Devil throughout Western history can be linked to large-scale transformations in the economic organization of Western societies, and are related to changes in the way that individuals imagine their position in this overarching system. I integrate the symbolic Marxism of Michael Taussig with Fredric Jameson's notion of cognitive mapping to explore the metonymic relation of dynamic changes in the symbolic structure of the Devil as a "mapping symbol" to the deep structure of capitalist accumulation and the penetration of capitalist logic into the communal and personal realms. Finally, I show how the Devil continues to be used as a sense-making device in order to translate the abstract and "spectral" logic of the capitalist system into terms that are compatible with the moral logic of everyday interpersonal relations.

Why focus on the Devil and its relation to the capitalist system? Marx mostly avoided the Devil as a simile, preferring the more Gothic image of the *vampire* (Smith 2001, 22). Recent Marxist theorizing (inspired by George Romero's criticism of consumer society in his cult classic *Dawn of the Dead*) is drawn to the more contemporary symbol of the *zombie* (Shaviro 2003, 282–3; Ritzer 2003, 129). Nevertheless, the Devil has enjoyed a renaissance in recent historical reconsiderations of popular culture in European history. This new research reveals that in the *popular* imagination, the Devil stands as a relatively flexible symbol, sometimes capable of representing the power of capital and modernity. Muchembled asserts that the Devil "has been . . . integral to the

development of the European world, an active player in a process that has seen the emergence and global triumph of a new way of being human” (2003, 2). This “new way of being human” that Muchembled connects to the figure of the Devil is nothing but the bourgeois subject of modern capitalism, as we shall see. First, however, let us examine the historical origins of the Devil.

The Devil in Western History: A Brief Sketch

The figure of the Devil has changed significantly throughout its existence in the collective imagination of the West. Arising in the theological systems of Judaism and Christianity, the Devil was a scattered character, presented as a tempting snake in Genesis, a proud Archangel in Isaiah, a bothersome instigator in Job, and an obsequious tempter in Matthew. In the folklore of the first millennium, the Devil remained an incoherent entity adopting different guises and features, depending on the local customs and pre-Christian religious practices. This diversity in representations of the Devil, according to Muchembled (2003), neatly reflects the cultural splintering and political fragmentation of the premodern European landscape. For the most part however, the everyday life of the medieval era was surprisingly free of Satanic influence.

During the first millennium, the Devil was conceived by most religious intellectuals as *powerless*, a being subjected to God’s eternal will and forced to play his assigned part in the cosmological order. This is reflected in popular practices, where demons and Devils were seen primarily as sporadic nuisances, sometimes even able to come under human control. Thus, the only type of social interaction with the Devil at this stage is “strategic”—and subject to the logic of external manipulation and control—rather than dialogic, in Habermas’s terms, as it is impossible to yet imagine the Devil as an intersubjective partner or even potential source of identification. Additionally, he had no special status in the popular imagination, but was joined by a myriad of other supernatural entities of equal and sometimes greater importance. As Muchembled observes, “the world was too enchanted for Lucifer alone to be the focus of dread, fear and anxiety. The poor devil had too many competitors to reign supreme” (2003, 20).

The Devil does not make his full entry into the European imagination until the eleventh and twelfth centuries. As Muchembled notes, it took the first rationalizing force of protocapitalist development—the incipient centralization of state structures in early modernity—for the Devil’s representation to begin to change. As ecclesiastical power centralized in the Vatican and political power fell into the hands of the early modern European kings, nationalizing elites retooled the Devil as a force of cultural domination and biopolitical control. The fear of eternal damnation and the elevation of the Devil as a lord of the supernatural realm represented in hell began to cement, and the Devil grew in power and influence as a transcendental symbolic figure—in fact, coming to replace most other early medieval evil spirits and demons as the primary purveyor of calamity in Western European folklore. The Devil was at this point, for the first time, portrayed as a powerful leader of other demons, with hell as his kingdom.

According to Muchembled, this portrayal of the Devil as the potent king of darkness comes to play a key role in the internalization of guilt that accompanies the rise of modern cultural models of civility in interpersonal relationships in what Norbert Elias (2000) referred to as the “civilizing process.” This transformation became integrated “into a unifying system for explaining life” (Muchembled 2003, 22). Muchembled places the heyday of this preliminary era of a *powerful and external Devil* as spanning the century from 1550 to 1650, a period coincidental to the “long sixteenth century” that marked the first wave of global capitalist expansion in the West, according to Wallerstein (1974, 15). Thus we have the *first* set of transformations of the figure of the Devil that corresponds to a large-scale transformation of the means of capital accumulation and political power.

This set of changes in early modernity brings with it for the first time the association of the figure of the Devil with processes of capital accumulation and business transactions. The more powerful of these connections is that of the Devil and the *business contract* at the beginning of the early modern period, a link that was already well established by the advent of the Renaissance. This cultural shift “crystallized a new view of the relations between humans and Mephistopheles . . . a very personal . . . relationship with the Devil” (Muchembled 2003, 63). The influence of this symbolic transformation of the popular image of the Devil is best exemplified by the spread of accusations, stories, and legends regarding individuals *selling their souls* to the Devil in exchange for earthly power and possessions, and women signing *blood pacts* to gain illicit supernatural abilities (thus, sexual anxieties concerning the figure of the witch and illicit *deals* with the Devil come to be intertwined). These reach their climax during the “witch craze” of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century that swept over Europe and that was transferred to the New World by Devil-obsessed Protestant Pilgrims (Delbanco 1995). As we will see, this association between the Devil and one of the basic processes of the capitalist mode of exchange and the modern division of labor is far from coincidental, and represents the most important functions that the figure of the Devil continues to serve in the larger collective imagination.

The Devil in Western Literature: A Brief Sketch

At the level of what Goldmann (1976, 76–88) referred to as “literary creation,” two major events in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries inextricably linked the incipient rise of merchant capitalism and the figure of the Devil, a link that I argue continues unbroken to this day (and that has been independently “reinvented” several times). First, Christopher Marlowe’s groundbreaking 1588 drama *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus* systematizes for the first time various popular notions connecting money-lending practices, profit making through the manipulation of supply, and other forms of wilful exploitation of “asymmetrical information” during business transactions (all heavily condemned at the time as “usury”) with evil in general and with the Devil in particular (Hand 2005, 15–9). Marlowe’s play is exemplary of a series of cultural challenges to the rise of the incipient institutional complex associated with merchant capitalism. However, it portrays Dr. Faustus as a contradictory figure: both the object of the audience’s moral condemnation and the primary *subject* of the audience’s

identification. As Hand notes, “Marlowe’s *Faustus* . . . plays a significant role in the discourse of early modern capitalism.” Thus, while Marlowe draws on the by then common associations between the Devil and unbounded avarice and greed, the fact that “Faustus himself comes across, like Milton’s Satan, as a character with whom the audience might identify and sympathize, suggests on a broader level the social and economic changes informing Marlowe’s ideas of what, for his audience, ambition and aspiration mean and how Faustus’ thoughts and deeds will signify” (Hand 2005, 21–2).

In the second half of the seventeenth century, John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667) opened the floodgates for a parallel dynamic to that of the juxtaposition of the Devil and capitalist practices—the process of *subjectivization* of the figure of the Devil. In that masterwork, Lucifer is for the first time presented as a modern, existential tragic character with a powerful inner life, and is given the kind of psychological depth and complexity of feeling usually reserved for the classic figures of ancient Greek tragedy. This is portrayed most forcefully in Milton’s use of the soliloquy to signal subjective depth and inner conflict, forcing the audience to identify with the Devil as the focal character (Forsyth 2003, 149–50). In Milton’s poem, however, the Devil is not just any subject; he is a recognizably *capitalist* subject. As Hand notes, “In *Paradise Lost*, Satan is indeed a capitalist figure. In fact, Satan . . . is a schizophrenic, shape-shifting demon who, like Faustus, struggles with his own identity, in part because he, like Faustus, is flying aimlessly through the world of capitalist exchange that is the hell into which he has been hurled. He is also, simultaneously, the father of capitalism, bringing it into the world via the temptation and the Fall” (Hand 2005, 5).

These two signs of the breakdown of the barrier between the Devil and the world of everyday affairs are once again brought together at the beginning of the nineteenth century through Goethe’s 1808 reworking of the Faust legend. Goethe adds a final element: a syntagmatic association of the Devil with the modern *secular* drive for instrumental-rational knowledge characteristic of Western science—in other words, the Devil as the “spirit that negates all.” Goethe’s Faust, as noted by Berman (1988), is the most important representation of the “spirit” (in the Weberian sense) of mature industrial capitalism, where the merchant’s interest in turning a profit is melded with the techno-rational subjugation of natural forces. Goethe’s *Faust* should thus be read with Marx and Engels’s portrayal of the bourgeoisie in the *Communist Manifesto*. As was the case with Marlowe, Goethe’s *Faust* is an inherently ambiguous figure, with the intended audience torn between identifying with his sheer ambition and boundless will and disavowing his rejection of all moral and metaphysical boundaries. However, in contrast with the comparatively petty motivations attributed to the title character in earlier tellings of the Faust legend (including Marlowe’s), Goethe’s is characterized precisely by the seeming *insatiability* of Faust’s desire for power, knowledge, and control of natural and human forces (Berman 1988, 60–70), corresponding to the much larger intensity and scale of modern capitalism.

The Devil and Commodity Fetishism

I have argued so far that, in both the popular imagination and the more delimited fields of literary creation, there is a clear link between certain representations of the

Devil and the different stages of development of the capitalist mode of production. This indicates that material, social, and political developments condition the specific associations between various institutional and cultural practices and the figure of the Devil. In particular, the Devil appears to have coevolved along with the development and rise to universal hegemony of certain Western institutions—in particular, the capitalist market and the bureaucratic state. Mirroring this development, the figure of the Devil becomes more “rationalized” and less bestial and otherworldly, ultimately becoming internalized as a disembodied “voice” within the individual subject. This is akin to Foucault’s distinction between a premodern power/knowledge regime based on external coercion and a modern one based on subjectivized biopolitics. Thus, as Muchembled notes, the “history of the Devil in the West is that of a gradual growth of his influence on society, accompanied by a total transformation of his assumed characteristics” (2003, 13). Furthermore, what appears to remain constant is the use of the Devil as a metonymic vehicle for different faces of capitalism as a historical social system.

According to Mandel, world capitalism has entered its third (multinational) stage. Mandel divides the development of modern capitalism according to three major phases: an early capitalist era of free competition with high international capital mobility, a classic era of imperialism with high international capital concentration, and *late capitalism* in which “the multinational company becomes the determinant organizational form of big capital” (1978, 316). If representations of the figure of the Devil respond to economic-organizational alterations occurring at the material level, it is reasonable to suppose that the new stage of multinational capital is likely to produce subsequent transformations (or modifications in reference) in the Devil’s collective representation. According to Marx, the most important trend in modern capitalism is related to ever widening dominance of the *commodity form* (both as an overarching mental structure and concrete set of social practices) as a regulator and shaper of our approach to the physical and social world. Thus, it would be no surprise for the Devil to acquire a metonymic relation to the process of commodification. We turn to an exploration of this possibility next. The analysis will show that, rather than being exhausted as a symbol, the Devil continues to possess the flexibility to “map” our current condition under conditions of global “postmodernity.”

In Marx’s original formulation capitalism depends, to assure its reproduction as a system of commodity exchange, on the endemic misidentification of what are essentially politically mediated relations between *persons* as if they were merely relations between *things*, these last viewed in the decontextualized terms of finance and the circulation of money (Marx 1967, 391–4). Thus, in our “modern” economic parlance, profits “grow,” capital “accumulates,” and savings “accrue” interest. Taussig notes the correspondence between the language bequeathed to us by the cosmology of Newtonian (meta)physics and the terms used to describe the functioning of the economy. Both are based upon the metaphorization of economic activity as a machinelike entity that “works” and “functions” as if endowed with agency and a life of its own. This *fetishization* of the economy, best exemplified by the animism imputed to the money medium, constitutes the basis of the Western “rational” view of economic action.

Anthropologist Michael Taussig (1980), using what he deems a variant of cultural analysis known as “symbolic Marxism,” has investigated the cultural functions that the figure of the Devil serves in the collective imagination of South American peasants. For Taussig, they represent a fascinating example of a population just being exposed to the deterritorializing influence of capital. Colombian peasants in Taussig’s account overlay quite a different symbolic code upon the workings of capital than the “rational” Western view. Two major ontological differences can be observed between their view of the economic world and that prevalent in the developed West. First, Colombian peasants do not think of money as inherently reproductive. In their cosmology, in order for money to “beget” more money, it has to undergo the same symbolic ritual of baptism and Christian name giving that a person must go through in order to acquire a productive place in the social structure. This belief is exemplified in the peasant custom of *El Bautizo del Billete* (Baptism of the Bill), in which a child’s godparent will smuggle a peso note into the Catholic ritual baptism ceremony, holding it in his hands while the priest bestows a Christian name on the child. It is believed that then and only then, after the peso has become personalized through the religious rite, can it return interest to his owner by being put into circulation (Taussig 1980, 126–38).

Second, Colombian peasants do not act in a “rational” utility-maximizing manner in their relation to wage labor. In their view, leaving one’s own land plot in order to work for the big plantation owners cannot result in an increase in productive capacities. Thus, the local workers view those who are successful at making money from wage labor as somehow having subverted the natural order of things. The way in which this illicit transaction is symbolized in their collective consciousness is through the familiar notion of *signing a contract with the Devil*. The money gained through this presumed transaction (labor power for currency) is considered nonproductive in the long run, and it cannot be used to purchase anything that is not perishable and nonconsumable in the short term. Anything else that is gained by exchanging what for them is an illicit and unnatural form of material gain, will be “cursed” and bound to bring bad luck and decay.

The denial of two of the basic postulates of modern Western economic thinking by Colombian peasants and the use of the Devil to symbolize this deadlock point to a set of processes that partially transcend the specific historical conditions of the Colombian peasantry (and that tell us much about our historical condition). First there is the dynamic of fetishization that appears as the mirror image of our economic animism. Thus, for Colombian peasants the money medium is essentially barren and incapable of being a productive force in its own right (corresponding to what Marx would deem a nonideological view of the economic process). Instead, money has to be endowed with “something extra” in order to return to the owner some profit. The additional characteristic that has to be added to the money form is nothing other than a *personal identity*, stolen as it were from the baby during the act of baptism. Further, Colombian peasants also regard the exchange of labor power for money and the increase in productive capacity in a proletarian context as something beyond individual control. They conceive of this as a process that has to be mediated by the otherworldly agency of the Devil, whom they picture as the effective guarantor that the capitalist will be able to extract the productivity of the worker and transfer it into the field.

The Devil as Cognitive Mapping

How is it possible to “think together” the apparently disparate facts of the transformation and emergence of the Devil in modern Western historical consciousness and his mediating role in the symbolic life of precapitalist populations first exposed to the disrupting dynamics of capital? Fredric Jameson’s conception of *cognitive mapping* (1992, 51) offers a conceptual means of unifying all these observations as separate instantiations of a single general process. In Jameson’s definition, a cognitive map is “that mental map of the social and global totality we all carry around in our heads in variously garbled forms” (415). He sees this notion of mapping as an elaboration of Althusser’s idea that every subject must, in her lived everyday relations within capitalism, have an *imaginary* sense of how she relates to the capitalist system as a totality.

The exacerbation of the need for some form of allegorical mapping of the system is strictly correlative to the increasing disjuncture between social structure and phenomenal self-understanding characteristic of modern capitalism. This process is made increasingly worse by the constant expansion of the capitalist mode of production in its constant drive toward *extension* of the institutional logic of the commodity form. This increasing penetration of the logic of capital is multi-dimensional, occurring at both a territorial-geographic spatial level in the world-system and a cultural, sociopsychological level of the unconscious (Jameson 1992). In this sense, the need for cognitive mapping emerges not as a simple “anthropological constant” associated with universal needs for ontological security and the stability of meaning (as Max Weber proposed), but as a *historically* induced challenge produced both by the intensity and scale of the contemporary global capitalist system, and by its increasing dependence on the *social* as the primary site of its reproductive activity.

I argue that one of the most common ways in which cognitive mapping is performed in everyday life is through the use of complex, multivocal cultural symbols—such as the Devil—that are able, due to their historical resonance and place in central cultural structures (such as religious belief systems), to condense large amounts of information about the functioning of the total system. Thus, the notion of a contract with the Devil was in Taussig’s account a way in which the workings of capitalism were rendered intelligible from the point of view of a noncapitalist meaning system. Thus, throughout the modern history of Western culture, the Devil has been, and continues to be, the symbolic mapping tool of the whole of the capitalist mode of production *par excellence*. Through this figure the externality of capitalism, and the nesting of the individual within its complex *web of affiliations* and *circuits of exchange*, is given intuitive form. Thus, the Devil as an example of collective efforts of cultural representation has figured prominently in the effort to map the appearance, functioning, and transformations of the capitalist world economy as it has progressed through the centuries.

This view sheds light on the intimate connection between the metaphor of the *contract* (according to Marx and Durkheim, the defining feature of modern associational and economic life as it allows labor power to become a commodity for the first time) and the figure of the Devil. The contract represents the first move away from the

organic form of association based on direct face-to-face interaction and bonds of trust based on tradition and kinship. At the level of popular cultural representation, the Devil “steps in” as it were to mark the transition from an economic regime based primarily on agrarian authority relationships between lord and serf to one in which the worker is expropriated from the land and is forced into circuits of exchange that transcend the local village. This takes the form of a cultural narrative of decadence (in Marlowe, for instance) of the Devil as a symbol of the dissolution of precapitalist society. The fact that the Devil is almost always coded as a disrupting, external force is evidence of the cultural resistance to the disruption caused by the breakdown of the strong social linkages of premodern communal society in favour of the alienating, but also liberating (Berman 1988), individualism characteristic of modernity.

This mapping, which I refer to as *the Devil as intrusive outsider*, is probably the most common one, and continues to be relevant today as shown in the work of Taussig. But if postmodernity entails the completion of the modern project as the natural community completely gives way to the artificial city (Jameson 1992), then it could be argued that the Devil as intrusive outsider can no longer serve its traditional mapping function (the inside/outside distinction implodes from within). If this were correct, we would expect the Devil as a symbol and as a practical mapping tool to disappear. However, I argue below that, in the wake of the recent transformations brought about by late capitalism, the Devil continues to be a useful mapping symbol, but this entails an accentuation of the important historical modifications that we have described as the “modernization” of the figure of the Devil.

This new mapping, to which I refer as *the Devil as one of us*, can be seen both as a way to represent the dangerous proximity of the late modern capitalist system to our everyday dealings in the life-world and as a symbol of the postideological sense in which capitalism is simply “business as usual,” as our capacity to imagine alternative futures and social arrangements atrophies. It is important to note that the “vanishing mediator,” or the intermediate mapping that serves as the conduit between the premodern mapping of Devil as outsider and the postmodern mapping of Devil as one of us, is that of *the Devil as business partner*. It can be said that if there is a particular pressing cultural-systemic need for the representation of some underlying structural conflict, then the Devil becomes the “flexible symbol” appropriate for our current stage of “flexible” capitalism. This is shown by the fact that some of the mappings that the Devil is usually associated with can be combined with other popular ones, such as the notion of conspiracy.

The Devil As Cognitive Mapping: Some Contemporary Examples

It is possible that the Devil is simply a mapping tool for precapitalist populations and that his influence disappears in contemporary attempts to deal with the nature of capitalism (as we move toward more “rational” ways of portraying our relation to the system). In this section, I demonstrate that the Devil continues to be one of the most appropriate cognitive mapping tools even for “sophisticated” residents of the contemporary global North. I proceed by examining representations of the Devil

and capital in contemporary Hollywood film, and show how we have not moved very far from the Colombian peasants portrayed by Taussig.

Consider as a first instance the Fraser Clarke Heston film *Needful Things* (1993). Here the devil is represented by a *storekeeper* who, by opening up a “shop” where each person’s fantasy is fulfilled by way of the purchase of a particular commodity, ends up destroying the ultimately fragile social fabric of the small town of Castle Rock. Here, the Devil here is used as a figure of ultimate corruption and dissolution of social links in the context of a small community, brought about by the introduction of the commodity form.

For our purposes, the key symbolic maneuver deployed in *Needful Things* is the linkage of the figure of the devil with that of *commodity fetishism*. Here the Devil is portrayed as a figure that knows our most intimate desires and sets up the store window with *precisely* the specific thing that we would do anything to obtain (an apt allegory for the culture industry and marketing system, which plays the role of the Lacanian Big Other or the “subject supposed to know” our most intimate desires [Žižek 1989, 162–4]). The store window thus functions as the “frame” for our most intimate fantasies, and desire is likened to temptation. The destruction of Castle Rock is symbolic of the destruction of primordial communal life under the consumption-driven imperative of late capitalism.

An example of a similar semiotic strategy can be found in George Miller’s *The Witches of Eastwick* (1987), in which once again the Devil is portrayed as an intrusive presence disrupting the calm, protected, and ultimately restrained life-world of a small New England town. Here the figure of the devil “millionaire” Daryl van Horne (Jack Nicholson) is in fact the creation of the *desire* of three bored single women, Alexandra Medford (Cher), Jane Spofford (Susan Sarandon), and Sukie Ridgemont (Michelle Pfeiffer), who conjure up a spell in a half-serious manner and are initially pleasantly surprised at the results. Here the juxtaposition is between the characteristically bourgeois, restrained, and severely repressed ethic of denial of pleasure exhibited by the inhabitants of the small town, and the worldly, urban (modernist and bohemian) attitude of openness to sensuality and new experiences that Van Horne brings with him.

As in *Needful Things*, the Devil is portrayed in *Eastwick* as the entity that is in charge of providing us with our most intimate desires (van Horne ends up impregnating all three women) and opening up the world of sensual temptation that ultimately connects us to the mass consumption system (as exemplified in the extravagant and seemingly insatiable eating and sexual habits of van Horne). *The Witches of Eastwick* in this sense can be seen as an example of the disjunction in the modern system first identified by Daniel Bell (1976, 3–25), where the values of restraint of the Weberian Protestant ethic (here symbolized by the religious, moralistic townsfolk) necessary to be a good member of the working masses is met by the counterethic of release, sensuality, and idiosyncrasy of experience necessary to be a good member of the consuming masses. Horne represents the “abandon” characteristic of the latter cultural complex, which once again is portrayed as the death knell and destruction of the closed links of communal life.

In recent film, the most naked portrayal of the Devil as a direct embodiment of the deterritorializing powers of (global/financial) capital, appropriate for the current

stage of multinational capitalism, comes to us in Taylor Hackford's *The Devil's Advocate* (1997). *Advocate* tells the story of a talented *small-town* Florida lawyer, Kevin Lomax (Keanu Reeves), who is able to use his (devilish) powers of persuasion to defend even the most despised criminals, having never lost a case. Lomax's performance catches the eye of the appropriately named John Milton (Al Pacino), an ultrapowerful "lawyer" from big New York City. Lomax accepts Milton's offer to join his powerful law firm and decides to move with his girlfriend to what his devoutly religious mother refers to as "Babylon." Once in the city, we see the Devil as the ultimate personification of the "spectral" and deterritorialized flows of finance capital goods and services that currently dominate transnational capitalism in the global North (Jameson 1997). Milton's firm handles the contracts of powerful multinational corporations, and Milton's influence appears boundless. A stroll through the firm's headquarters reveals an army of lawyers busily at work coordinating far-flung financial deals across the global system, speaking in several foreign languages (an obvious nod to the current stage of "flexible" capitalism undergirded by a global system of communications).

In *Advocate*, the Devil is no longer the gaunt phantasmagorical figure in *Needful Things* or the disruptive eccentric embodied in the figure of van Horne. Rather, Pacino's Milton is even closer to us (urban residents of the global North): an anonymous bureaucrat as at home and nondescript in the mass anonymity of the subway ride back from work as in the next corporate board meeting that will decide the fate of thousands. This is a postmodern devil in Jameson's sense: here the small Florida town recedes into the background and most of the action takes place in the "big city." In contrast, the narratives in *Needful Things* and *Eastwick* retain the imagery of the precapitalist small town as a real alternative to the far-flung big city.

In *Advocate*, the Devil's presence is no longer a traumatic interruption of the rhythms of small-town life, but an unnoticed, suit and tie-clad background presence in every urban megalopolis, consistent with Jameson's claim that, in postmodernity, the very distinctions modern/premodern, urban/rural, natural/artificial lose their basis in reality and come to occupy a place only in the collective imaginary as a form of *nostalgia* (Jameson 1992, 279–96). In *Advocate*, this can be interpreted as a direct sign of the exhaustion of the previous modes of representation of the Devil as coming from the outside: he is now *one of us*, and (due to our imbrications in the contemporary market system) we have moved closer to him. At the end of the film, the Devil appears to be defeated by a courageous act of *free will* on the part of Lomax, only to reappear under the guise of a representative of the mass media (suggesting powerful complicity between the powers of global capital and the news and entertainment industry). Thus, in another contrast to *Needful Things* and *Eastwick*, where the evil forces unleashed by the Devil's presence appear to come under control (and an attempt is made to reconstruct a semblance of small-town life), *The Devil's Advocate* ends in a more ominous tone. The Devil is omnipresent and unavoidable even when, as acculturated bourgeois citizens, we exercise our powers of "choice."

Jameson argues that *conspiracy* remains the ultimate rough-and-ready mapping tool in late capitalism: "the poor person's cognitive mapping" (2000, 286). Conspiracy provides an imputation of purpose (there is really a single unitary presence behind the scenes) to the apparently mechanical nature of the modern

distribution, flow, and operation of capital. While conspiracy may be empirically false (there is really no *single* mastermind behind it all), it remains valid at the representational level as an indicator of the difficulty of forming accurate conceptions of the amorphous, “spectral” operation of capital under conditions of global expansion (Derrida 1994, 10, 51; Žižek 2001, 11–20). If this is the case, then we should expect to observe a similar contemporary connection between the figure of the Devil and the theme of conspiracy.

This is precisely what we find in Bryan Singer’s cult classic *The Usual Suspects* (1995), which tells the story of how “the Devil himself”—legendary Hungarian gangster Kayser Soze—comes to impersonate lowly, third-rate criminal Roger “Verbal” Kint (Kevin Spacey) in order to destroy his remaining enemies. Spacey’s Devil is even more ostensibly nondescript, weak, and “ordinary” than Pacino’s Milton. However, in *Suspects*, this weakness is mere *appearance* as the Devil retains his quasi-magical powers of being everywhere and nowhere at the same time, pulling the strings and seemingly manipulating all situations to his advantage. Tellingly, Kint spends the entire movie repeating Baudelaire’s warning that “the greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was convincing the world that he did not exist,” but the audience in the end has no doubt that he very well does.

In *Suspects*, the connection between the Devil and conspiracy is made when it is revealed that Kint’s arrest has “turned political,” with Kint appearing to be “protected from up on high by the prince of . . . darkness” as the major, chief of police, and governor all being somehow involved in guaranteeing his immediate release and thorough exculpation from any criminal charge. Here the high/low distinction (usually reserved for the distinction between heaven and hell) is deconstructed by being juxtaposed (and thus turned upside down in moral terms) to the analogous distinction between those who are high (controlling the apparatus of political and economic power) and those who are low (the powerless). In the earthly realm represented in both *Advocates* and *Suspects*, the Devil (as representative of evil) occupies the “high” post, “calling the shots” from behind the scenes, while the good (here represented by the “honest” U.S. customs officer Dave Kujan [Chazz Palminteri]) are powerless to stop it as they become ensnared in the web of lies and deception. Part of the appeal of *Suspects*, I believe, can be traced to this melding of the postmodern mapping tool of conspiracy with the mythico-religious power of the simile of the Devil.

Conclusion

Before the advent of capitalism, the Devil stood as an otherworldly bestial creature, removed from everyday intercourse. His behavior appeared inscrutable and random, and those who left the protection of the primordial community and dared to wander on their own were vulnerable to his influence. As the capitalist mode of production expanded, taking the shape of a global system in the sixteenth century and dissolving the essential links of community through the spread of markets, expansion of the state, urbanization, and industry, the Devil began to change representational form by acquiring human motives, especially those associated with the covetousness and

acquisitiveness of the capitalist merchant in Marlowe, ultimately becoming internalized as a permanent presence in the subjective sphere.

Milton's devil, while still a supernatural creature, is much closer to us than the medieval monster. Goethe's *Faust* completes the humanization of the Devil and cements the connection between the figure of the Devil and the institution of the business contract that began with Marlowe. This last connection is important since the impersonal contract is the defining feature of the *organic* solidarity of modernity that, in Durkheim's view, replaced the old mechanical solidarity of the premodern world, and that makes possible the relentless process of the commodification of labor power and the associated (and under capitalism) dehumanizing division of labour (Marx and Engels 1965, 32). The Devil is now the purveyor of all earthly knowledge, akin to the bourgeois classes who stop at nothing in their bid to sweep away and destroy medieval "prejudice" and "backwardness" (as detailed by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto*), symbolizing the triumph of unbounded scientific curiosity over medieval scholasticism (Berman 1988, 37–71).

This is the period during which modern post-Enlightenment science and capital become most symbiotic. The industrial revolution created the conditions under which capitalism cemented its hold and prepared itself for complete global expansion (where the Euro-American world-system began to encompass the world in the nineteenth-century wave of colonialism). I have argued that this can be interpreted as a form of *cognitive mapping* in Jameson's sense. The signifying complex of the Devil, the contract, and capitalist accumulation continue to be active even in contemporary popular culture (as deployed in recent Hollywood films), symbolizing the overarching politico-economic system of modern capitalism in its present-day incarnation. Here the Devil comes to be linked with the "spectral" ubiquity and nonmateriality of contemporary (hyper)global capitalism, which appears mainly in the form of abstract finance capital (Jameson 1997).

The Devil is also linked to the system's ability to influence our behavior through the trope of temptation (consumer society). The contemporary Devil (in contrast to the *coercive* medieval monster), however, must now respect individual free will and ability to *choose*, as when Pacino's Milton wryly notices his own inability to coerce Lomax into participating in his master scheme: "Free will . . . it is a bitch." This is in strict accordance with the central role that the political creation of the modern subject-citizen endowed with private rights and personal choice plays in the modern system of rational capitalism. Ironically, the subject that even the Devil must now respect is the very same capitalist subject that, according to Muchembled, would have been impossible without the cultural invention of the modern Devil.

It is not far-fetched to propose that, so long as the continuing expansion of the capitalist system produces the need for cognitive mapping of its operations, the figure of the Devil will persist in the popular imagination. It is also possible that he may be joined by other, more "sophisticated" forms of cognitive mapping such as alien life forms and elaborate conspiracies by powerful state agencies, as in Chris Carter's cult classic *The X-Files*. In fact, the recent emergence of aliens as the otherworldly, very powerful beings who come from nowhere to affect humans and are capricious and difficult to predict, may signal an appropriately modified return to the medieval conception of the Devil as a beastly creature removed from the world (see Dean 1998).

This may be related to the increasingly diminished capacity to map the global system as it moves toward even more complexity and global expansion. Alternatively, as a renewed wave of interest in exorcism and the continued formation of sects dedicated to Satanism attest, the Devil may not be done just yet, but may be in the middle of making “an impressive comeback” (Muchembled 2003, 1). Thus, it is still a possibility that a rehabilitated Devil will retain his throne as the preferred way of mapping global capitalism.

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