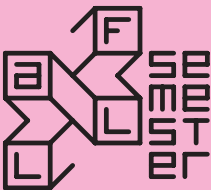
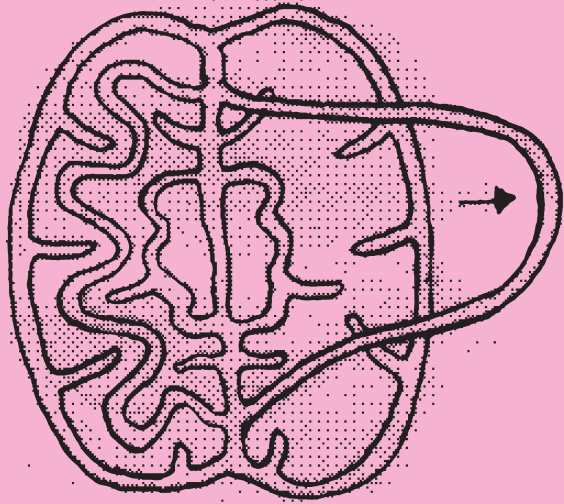
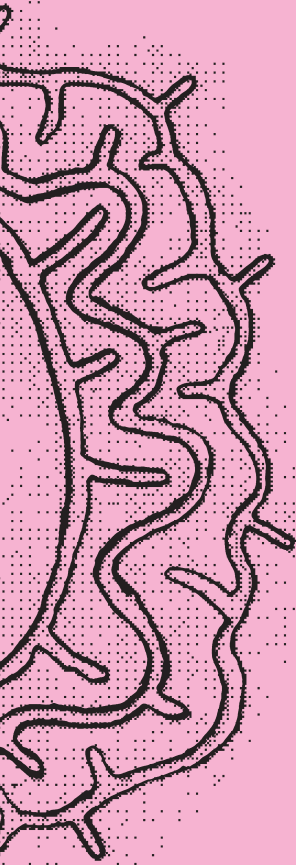


Zachary Cahill

Dear Capitalism,  
You Can Have my Soul  
but I'm keeping the Body





Zachary  
Cahill

Dear  
Capitalism,  
You Can Have  
My Eternal Soul  
But I'm Keeping  
the Body

*Prelude*

*What does it mean to be a "little off"? To not be lining up with the world in ways you are accustomed to? What kind of thoughts might follow that misalignment? What kind of writing?*

*It's probably true that we, those of us who are fortunate enough to get to think in public, want to present ourselves as competent...convincing even...Maybe contribute something that makes us stand out from the thicket of thoughts and aesthetic nuance. But surely thoughts that are "a little off" must have merit of some sort, seeing as many of us whether we want to or not embody that off-ness on a regular basis...That off-ness is the rule and competency is the exception might be reason enough to share thoughts from a scene of being not quite right...*

*In this regards I think of DeKooning's late paintings...The spare paintings that are often dismissed as being the ones he made when he had dementia...And therefore not up to par with the work he made at the "height of his powers"... This dismissal strikes me as sad for a couple of reasons. Primarily because it seems a missed opportunity to think about a mind in the state of dementia...Not as a kind of sympathetic appeal for the artist (though why not that too?), but because it is a state that we all share or will share in our own life or through relations with someone we might know with the disease. It should go without saying dementia or Alzheimer's is not simply a little off, it is rather a radical alteration of being in the world. What's more, it ripples out to the loved ones and it effects them in drastic and painful*



*ways. Ways that bind people to the disease that they could have never anticipated... To point where one who does not physically have the disease, might be justified in saying: I have Alzheimer's.*

*Such is the impact the disease has on a familial relation of someone with Alzheimer's. You may not have it physically but you definitely are hit with it psychically. Imprinted with a new reality. This is the space that I conceived the lines that follow. The ever present backstory that shadows each word of this text. Over the last six odd years I have watched as Alzheimer's has effected my mother's brain... How it brutally altered her reality... I won't... I can't... go into detail what that means... Other than to say it's a horror I hope you who are reading this will not have to experience... Instead I want to share a line of thinking that perhaps could have only developed through an intimate encounter of watching someones brain change and be witness as their reality glitches to the point of dissolve...*

*This then is (as much of my writing since this encounter) a little off.*

**Dear Capitalism, You can have my eternal soul but I am keeping the body...Ps. I hope you choke on it: My soul.**

What is a body? What is a soul? My body? Your body? Body and Soul. Your body and my soul? My body and your soul? What are they ? People smarter than myself have wondered about these connections and have arrived at more sophisticated conclusions than I could have arrived at on my own. I have read their texts or at least some of them and they have influenced my thinking...

Giorgio Agamben notes that:

"The soul, just like form-of-life, is what in my zoe, in my bodily life does not coincide with my bios, with my political and social existence, and yet has 'chosen' both, practices them both in this certain, unmistakable mode. It is itself, in this sense, the mesos bios that, in every bios and every zoe, adventorously severs, revokes, and realizes the choice that unites them by necessity in this certain life. Form-of-life, the soul, is the infinite

compliment between life and and mode of life, what appears when they mutually neutralize one another and show the void that united them. Zoe and Bio – this is perhaps the lesson of the myth are neither separate or coincident: between them, as a void of representation of which it is not possible to say anything except that it is 'immortal' and 'ungenerated' , stands the soul, which holds them indissoluble in contact and testifies for them." <sup>1</sup>

Agamben lingers on the indissoluble gap between body and soul, or somehow he seems to think that the soul is a gap that can't be crossed precisely because it is immortal.

Judith Butler posits, "...bodies are themselves vectors of power where directional forces can be reversed; they are embodied interpretations, engaging in allied action to counter force with another quality of force. On the one hand, these bodies are productive and performative. On the other hand they can persist and act only when they are supported, by environments, by nutrition, by work, by modes of sociality and belonging. And when these supports fall away and precarity is exposed, they are mobilized in another way, seizing upon the supports that exist in an order to make a claim that there can be no embodied life without social and institutional support without ongoing employment, without networks of interdependency and care, without collective rights to shelter and mobility." <sup>2</sup>

### Body and soul.

Last summer, I found myself running a lot. Training for a marathon. I was out running in the sun and I noticed things. My shadow, my breathing, the way my mind would disconnect from my body after hours of running and I would take note of what was happening to me...It was not exactly an out-of-body experience...I was still very much in my body... but I could see my body functioning like a machine...The questions generated from running weren't questions of fitness...though I suppose that is how I arrived at some of these ideas...

What was striking to me then, as it is now, is somehow I could witness an uncoupling of my body and soul...the soul being eternal—it wasn't mine...was that I, being possessed of a soul, was in something like a rental agreement of sorts where I

got to participate in eternity...a time share, if you will... and yet the body, as I observed while running, wasn't really me either... somehow I was balanced between this very particular thing that was running along Lake Michigan, variously sweating, breathing, thinking. A body that got tired or energized and this other thing that was impersonal and timeless... my eternal soul...which was and was not me...then as my feet kept hitting the asphalt I wondered maybe...I am neither of those things...maybe...maybe I am the AND...the and in the expression Body and Soul...this seemed to make sense to me later with what Agamben and Butler were describing...with Agamben maybe the AND was a gap, with Butler the AND was our infrastructural co-habitation our link to each other...its funny to identify with a grammatical connector, by which I mean it felt destabilizing but with that destabilization something interesting happens... we get to choose...We can choose to make our AND an OR...Body or Soul.

Capitalism.

What can you do?

Its such a big term that its hard to really say anything about it that doesn't feel like pretty vapid leftist quasi-academic posturing...I don't know much about it really...its history sort of...its reality— I live it everyday as do you I imagine...I watch: and what I see are screens...people staring at screens, shuffling email around the underground cables and in above ground cellular transmissions in the cancer soaked air...I see this and I see the unhappy way we orient our bodies...eating poorly because we are on the move...working...the body is getting used up as Capitalism gobbles up all our resources but we are capitalism in a way too...we are eating up our own bodies... consuming and being consumed...we hunger for things (stability, health insurance, recognition, worth, sex, money) and our hunger doesn't seem to stop because we are Capitalism which is an ever consuming beast...maybe best exemplified in America today by Donald Trump a beast that feeds off itself...a hole in reality...That sucks the life out of life...reality television infecting reality itself...anti-reality...but i don't want to invoke

that monster...I want to invoke something that will give us a difference from the logic of eternal consumption.

Therefore I propose we choose the body and relinquish our eternal soul to capitalism and let it feast on the eternal...The Church was capital and had all the capital (maybe it still does) but now Capitalism is our church and I want a new religion...Endlessness is just not worth it. We need new gods. Temporary gods.

So, while Capitalism is munching away on the souls of eternity we can care for our bodies and each other...we only get one body...True the soul can incarnate multiple bodies but...the body that is here now is singular...a carbon based form tied to the heat register of our sun which will one day flame out... So lets be with each other in these bodies...take care them and build them as weapons of resistance...no, lets not do that...let's resist the rhetoric of resistance too (its a pawn of capitalism)... why rescue the body to turn it into a weapon?...lets side-step any stupid war altogether and let the brave souls duke it out ... capitalists vs anti-capitalist...I am a body...my body marks my singularity and yours and I want to share that singularity with you while we can before the sun goes cold...I want to feel your presence now in this moment...the touch of your skin...our skin which is just as mysterious as abstract notions of the soul...

But even if I am wrong and what I am calling the body is really the soul I am not sure that really matters...does it? Its about feeling you here i? Feeling together? My Body in your soul...Your soul in My Body....touching Love and Friendship.... Heaven...Our Bodies and Our Souls and and and and and

### Post Script

But of course I am wrong...The body i am describing is abstract...Or, using my white male body as a point of departure sounds to me now abstract; or presumptuous...Maybe I'm not wrong about my body and the running, my experience; but it's only partial...Specificity matters when we speak about bodies doesn't it?...Isn't that what I am proposing in way with my temporary gods and the like? I can't speak for other bodies but maybe I could talk with them...listen...Try to hear them more... More than I have been doing...Listening to your own heart beat



is good...But I want to try hear other hearts beating too...Don't want to be alone...

I hear female friends talk about their bodies...often about being stuck in a body that is exposed and subjected to ageism, sexism, misogyny, and violence...at the workplace, in the museum, in school, in transit, at home...Really, take a minute to reflect on the enormity of the wickedness that stalks women the world over and it will destroy you. Take another moment to think about courage and perseverance each woman musters to face that wickedness and you are left in awe.

It's true—I must be guilty of idealizing women...and that is no doubt part of the problem too, but look what I have to work with in the opposite sex (my fellow men I mean)...and the odds against anyone trying to resist idealization...

The system is designed to warp your mind, pervert desire on a massive scale...I read and re-read this passage in Eva Illouz's book *Why Love Hurts*:

"Following a managerial system which devised new methods to package and distribute goods, an industry of cosmetics promoted the body as an aesthetic surface, detached from moral definitions of personhood. This process was accelerated and generalized as across all social classes the cosmetics industry collaborated with the fashion and movie industries. The cosmetics and fashion industries became all the more powerful because they received the endorsement of the cultural industries of movies, modeling, and advertising and were amplified by them. The movie studios, women's magazines, advertisers, and billboards functioned as popularizers, codifiers, and amplifiers of new ways to put forth the body, foreground the face, and eroticize the flesh. Women were incorporated in consumer culture as sexed and sexual agents through the ideal of sexualized beauty that was aggressively promoted by the conjunction of economic sectors that solicited and constructed a self based on eroticism. The new cult of beauty in women's magazines and movies 'explicitly connected make-up and sex appeal' in seamlessly weaving together cosmetics, femininity, consumption, and eroticism. In other words, an array of new industries helped promote and legitimize the sexualization of women and, later, of men. The body was apprehended as

a sensual body, actively looking for sensuous satisfaction, pleasure, and sexuality. Such search for sensuous satisfaction gave way to the sexualization of the body: the body could and should evoke sexuality and eroticism, arouse it in another, and express it. The construction of eroticized female bodies, across all social classes, was thus one of the most formidable cultural accomplishments of early twentieth-century consumer culture." <sup>3</sup>

AND:

"The foregrounding of the body in US culture and the intense commodification of sex and sexuality made 'sexual attractiveness' a cultural category in itself, detached from moral value per se . The cult of beauty, and later of fitness, and the definition of masculinity and femininity in terms of erotic and sexual attributes were relentlessly promoted by the cultural industries and had the effect of progressively transforming sexual attraction and sexiness into positive cultural categories in their own right, making sexual desirability one of the central criteria for choosing a mate and for shaping one's own personhood. The commodification of sex and sexuality –their penetration into the very heart of the capitalist engine –made sexuality into an attribute and experience increasingly detached from reproduction, marriage, long-lasting bonds, and even emotionality."<sup>4</sup>

Illouz profoundly maps out the problem of the body... the female body as it is instrumentalized to sell us stuff and false corporate imaginaries of the good life...God

help me...I don't want to re-foreground the body in that way... The capitalist body...The body as commodity...The monetized body of desire...That drives the hungry beast of capitalism...Fever dream of want.

But capitalism is not the whole story...There are other stories, other bodies, other ways of being together...

THERE HAS TO BE.

In the new forward to her book *Hope in the Dark*, Rebecca Solnit makes a strong argument for this possibility to show how it already exist...another type of body (so to speak). She writes:

"Most of us would say, if asked, that we live in a capitalist society but vast amounts of how we live our everyday lives—our interactions with and commitments to family lives, friendships, avocations, membership in social, spiritual, and political organizations— are in essence noncapitalist or even anticapitalist, full of things we do for free, out of love, and on principle." <sup>5</sup>

Solnit concludes her book by noting:

"We are all activists in some way or another because our actions (and inactions) have impact. And it [Hope in the Dark] was written against something— a defeatist, dismissive frame of mind that is far too widespread. We talk about politics as they were a purely rational exercise in the world of deeds and powers, but how we view that world and act in it has its roots in identities and emotions."<sup>6</sup>

These are new gods...Rooted in identities and emotions...New bodies...Particular...Resistant...The future is female...and...





**Zachary Cahill** is an interdisciplinary artist who has been working on the long term the project USSA 2012, an exhibition-based fictional narrative relating to concepts of nation building, since 2009. He has had solo exhibitions at the KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, Germany; the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; the Smart Museum of Art; and Threewalls, Chicago, amongst other.

His work has recently been included in *The Works: Artists in and From Chicago* at CAB Brussels, Belgium (2015), *Magic Mountain* at the MCA Santa Barbara (2015), the 8th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art (2014) and numerous exhibitions in the US and Europe. His writings have appeared in *Afterall*, *Artforum*, *Frieze*, and *Mousse*. Cahill is a regular contributor to *Artforum.com*

\* Zachary Cahill, *Seance V. 12*, Goethe Institut 2016 Kultursymposium, Weimar, Germany. performance documentation, June 3rd, 2016.  
**1** Giorgio Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, trans. Adam Kotako,

(Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2015) 262.

**2** Judith Butler, *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2015) 84.

**3** Eva Illouz, *Why Love Hurts: A Sociological*

*Explanation*, Polity Press, 2013. Electronic reader version.

**4** Ibid.

**5** Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities*, (Chicago, Haymarket Press, 3rd edition, 2016) XVI-XVII.

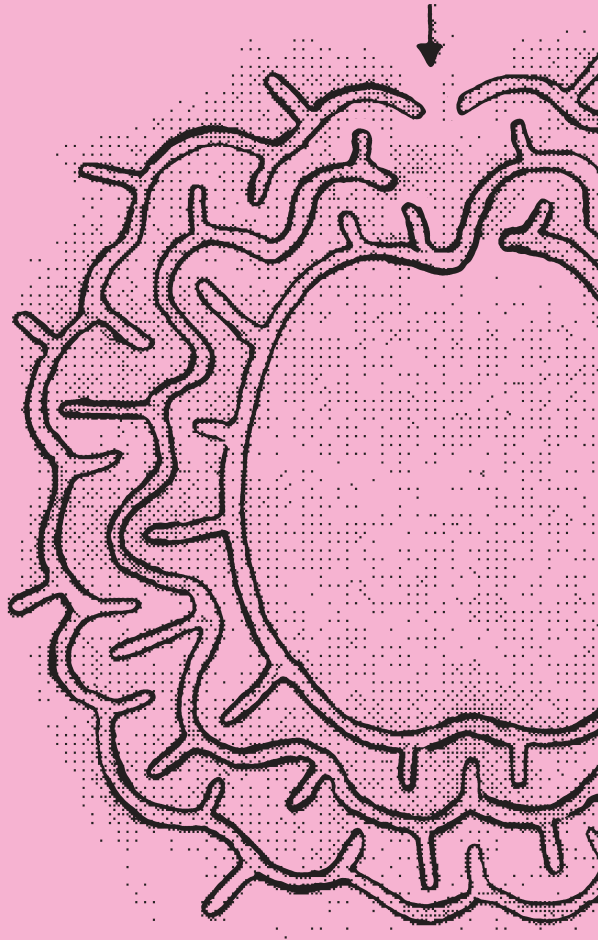
**6** Ibid. 137.



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