The Corporeal Politics of Quality (*Suzhi*)

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Socialism could be described as the winning back of the gift supplement into responsibility.
Gayatri Spivak, "Ghostwriting"

The phantom-like nature of value—what could be a more compelling topic in the wake of the bursting of the 1990s economic bubble, when the value of the new economy seemed suddenly to dissipate overnight? Where did value go? And how can it be that, in the midst of a global restructuring of capitalism, certain things that formerly seemed to have so much value are now deemed to be what society (or something called that) can no longer afford?

The topic of value is particularly compelling in light of the momentous social transformations taking place in China during the last quarter of the twentieth century. In the movement from a planned to a market economy, the representation of value has undergone a reorganization in the realm of the biopolitical in which human life becomes a new frontier for capital accumulation. This changing rela-

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tionship between value and bodies is encompassed by the term *suzhi*, which roughly translates into English as "quality." *Suzhi* is hardly a neologism, but it acquired new discursive power when it became conjoined with the idea of population (*renkou*) in the economic reforms that began in 1976. The discourse of population quality (*renkou suzhi*) may have first appeared in the 1980s, in state documents investigating rural poverty that attributed China's failure to modernize to the "low quality" (*suzhi di*) of its population, especially in rural areas. This idea represents a shift in state policy focus from regulating births to raising the quality of the population as a whole; in other words, a shift from quantity to quality. Anxieties about the low quality of the Chinese people entered into the culture fever (*wenhua re*) of the late 1980s, in which intellectuals debated the cultural impediments to modernization. By the early 1990s, population quality had become a key term in the party-state's policy statements and directives to cadres, even as it began to circulate more broadly as a general explanation for everything that held the Chinese nation back from achieving its rightful place in the world. At the same time, as economic reforms increased privatization and dismantled the institutions and entitlements of state socialism, *suzhi* appeared in new discourses of social distinction and the discursive production of middle classness. *Suzhi*'s sense has been extended from a discourse of backwardness and development (the quality of the masses) to encompass the minute social distinctions defining a "person of quality" in practices of consumption and the incitement of a middle-class desire for social mobility. How *suzhi* articulates the boundaries of China's newly differentiating social strata, even as it produces subject positions necessary for capitalist accumulation, is the subject of this essay.

The discourse of *suzhi* appears most elaborated in relation to two figures: the body of the rural migrant, which exemplifies *suzhi* in its apparent absence, and the body of the urban, middle-class only child, which is fetishized as a site for the accumulation of the very dimensions of *suzhi* wanting in its "other." My pairing these two figures as a strategy of writing responds to the apparent refusal of my middle-class interviewees to make the linkage between them. One of my interviewees, who was an urban professional fully invested in managing the educational career of his child, testily interrupted me to say that the use of the term *suzhi* in evaluating the embodied value of both child and migrant referred to "two entirely different kinds of *suzhi*." For him, *suzhi* represented a differential, a play between plenitude and lack that could not be set into relation with each other. As in this instance, strategies of middle-class social positioning employ a rhetoric and practice of separation. This is stunningly concretized by the construction of

new gated communities far away from the *pinmin ku* (the Chinese translation of what Marx called "ghettos of the poor" in *Capital*). My ethnographic project to examine how middle-class parents have intensified their practices of child nurture seemed to encounter the migrant as a ghostly double of the child in an overturning of how value is materialized. Here, rather than the laboring body of the rural migrant, it is the labor of the child caught up in the culling process of school admissions and test scores and the labor of the parents to provide the child with resources to be successful in these endeavors that have become emblematic of the production of value in contemporary China. It seemed that what I was observing was nothing less than a substitution of bodies in which the extraction of value from one body was being accumulated in the other.

How do bodies in the context of China's economic reforms give material expression to something so abstract as value? I approach this question through a poststructuralist reading of Marx's concept of value as a concept-metaphor that has no proper body of its own but can be expressed only in terms of a differential. Value is, in Marx's German, *Inhaltlos*, without content, a form of appearance (Spivak 1990: 96). To track the circuit of value and its accumulation in contemporary China, we must attend to the formative power of *suzhi* as an ideological formation that enables the transfer of economic value from one body to another. The body that is recognized as having value is thereby a body to which value has been added through educational investment rather than one from which surplus value has been extracted. *Suzhi* not only codes that difference but channels it toward capital accumulation. In evoking Marx here, I commit myself to his spirit of critique while being acutely conscious that his ghostly presence in the recent Chinese past produces an unease that is doubled in the realm of theoretical production. At the same time, I am cautious about attempting to ground the concept of value in any metaphor of substance. The history of revolution and political mobilizations during the Maoist period demonstrates the dangers of a telescoping vision in which the effects of a dispersed system of economic relations were collapsed into a localized politics of retribution that seized upon the body of the class enemy as the register for struggle.[1]

And yet, the object that Marx's thought intended toward, capitalism as an expansive mode of production that seeks its motive energy through the appropriation of surplus value, presents itself all the more forcibly in our time as that

1. See Anagnost 1997, chap. 1, for a discussion of the dangers of misplaced concreteness in Chinese revolutionary narratives that used a language of bodies and class injury as its material ground.

which is most thought provoking—despite the power of neoliberal hegemonies and consumerist logics to put a seemly face on what is monstrous.[2] If bodies are read as expressions of value—as human capital—then we must approach these expressions as a kind of coded text and attend to the complex politics of representation that gives value its embodied forms. I find recent speculations on the value form a promising beginning for tracking a dispersed system of interlinking value chains not limited to the economic. The concept of value becomes a means for following the transcoding of inequalities that simultaneously operates in the production of economic, social, political, and affective value.[3] *Suzhi* is a sign that transects all these domains: the evaluation of embodied labor; the goal of educational reform (*suzhi jiaoyu* or "quality education"); the specter of social disorder; the criteria of cosmopolitan citizenship (through consumer taste); and the evaluation of the child's psychological health (*xinli suzhi*). How do these diverse expressions of *suzhi* effect the extraction of value from one body and its accumulation in another? In this essay, I argue that *suzhi* is what defines the middle-class family as a theater of neoliberal subject production through the project of building quality into the child. At the same time, the desire for acquiring *suzhi* is what lures the migrant laborer to the city as an escape from rurality. For both members of the urban middle class and rural migrants, *suzhi* defines strategies for social mobility, albeit from vastly different positions of privilege in the new economy. *Suzhi* is the quintessential expression of how subjects are set up for the rational choice making that grounds China's capitalist transformation.

China's economic reforms have produced new forms of socioeconomic inequality and a reorganization of the socialist planned economy according to the logic of the market. Rural populations uprooted from the bounded collectivities of the socialist economy have become a mobile reserve of cheap labor for urban areas and the newly established export processing zones. The valuing of this labor operates according to a circular logic of value coding.[4] Migrant labor is devalued as having "low quality" (*suzhi di*). Not only does it lack value, but its sheer mas-

2. This notion of what presents itself to thought must reference Martin Heidegger (1968: 4, 6): "Thought-provoking is what gives us to think . . . what gives us to think is then not anything that we determine"; "Only when we are so inclined toward what in itself is to be thought about, only then are we capable of thinking." The changed conditions for capital accumulation in the post–Cold War era is what presents us with new demands for our thinking, what Michel Foucault (1994: 670) has called *problematization*.

3. In particular, I am indebted to Gayatri Spivak's deconstructive readings of Marx (as well as her critical readings of Jacques Derrida's writings on Marx) in a series of interlinked essays (Spivak 1987, 1988, 1990, 1993, and 1999).

4. Barbara Herrnstein Smith (1990: 178) notes the recursivity in any attempt to define value.

siveness—its excess quantity—represents an overwhelming obstacle to modernization.[5] At the same time, the undervaluation of migrant labor is what allows for the extraction of surplus value enabling capital accumulation. This seemingly inexhaustible supply of surplus labor becomes the motive force of capitalist accumulation. The coding of the migrant body as having low quality justifies the extraction of surplus value while it also serves to legitimate new regimes of social differentiation and governmentality. The migrant body and its productivity are therefore *derogated*, producing a surplus value in both economic and politico-cognitive realms. The *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*'s definition of *derogate* is "to cause to seem inferior," but as an intransitive verb, it also means "to take away a part so as to impair." I draw attention to this layered meaning in order to connect the migrant body said to be lacking value to a body from which something has been removed. The migrant body's presumed lack of value masks the fact that value is produced by the living labor that is extracted from it. The laboring migrant body is the hidden source of wealth production in China's economic "takeoff," even as its lack of value is blamed for holding back China's development. The discourse of *suzhi* therefore yields a surplus value not just in the economic realm but also in the realm of political representation. It works ideologically as a regime of representation through which subjects recognize their positions within the larger social order and thereby sets up the conditions for socioeconomic striving.

The discourse of *suzhi* circulates in reform-era China as a form of common sense adhering to bodies as a measure of their worth as human capital. However, *suzhi* must be read as an inverse image of value in order to see how it functions ideologically. *Suzhi* is not something that naturally inheres in the body but is rather something that must be built into the body—a supplement that must be added to its "bare life." Here I am using Giorgio Agamben's term to distinguish the natural living body from the subject of political life. The set of distinctions that define *suzhi* could be seen as an expression of what Agamben (1998: 7) calls "qualified life"—political life understood as the good life. In the discourse of *suzhi*, qualified life is distinguished through embodied capacities acquired through intensified child nurture, educational inputs, and training. It is a form of capital accumulation that is measured as a time completed—a potentiality fulfilled. The

5. Ironically, this image of population as excessively large (*renkou guoduo*) corresponds to its physical displacement. That this uprooting has been ostensibly driven by a logic of the market, whereby rural people voluntarily choose to leave their villages, does not diminish the categorical violence of becoming a body deemed of low value.

body becomes a site of social and familial investment through the accumulation of embodied competencies along a division between mental and manual labor: education for the middle-class child and labor discipline for the migrant. For the subject, the politics of *suzhi* become a struggle for recognition as a body of value, in which some bodies are recognized as having more value than others and therefore more deserving of the rights of citizenship.

The devaluation of labor premised upon the low quality of the migrant body naturalizes the exploitation of labor through a rhetoric of value coding. The discourse of *suzhi* masks or displaces value as a critical concept that might otherwise reawaken a Marxist critique of China's present capitalist transformation. In contradistinction to *suzhi*, Marx's concept of value is seen to originate within the body's "superadequation to itself," its ability to produce more than it costs itself, a differential extractable as "surplus value" (Spivak 1988: 173).[6] From this perspective, the productive power of the migrant body becomes a figure of superfluity rather than of lack. But the migrant also represents something else, which is nothing less than capitalism's necessary relation to its outside. The migrant in her or his deterritorialization from the rural economy marks a new frontier for the expansion of capital accumulation.

In comprehending this relation, we must take note of the specific historical moment in which China's army of reserve labor became available for global capital. Those who trumpet the triumph of capitalism as the end of history almost certainly fail to recognize, if only in retrospect, that the once-existing socialisms effectively engendered a heterogeneity that now becomes the condition of possibility for reenacting the violence of a primitive accumulation.[7] Capitalism needs to feed off what lies outside itself in order to stave off, through constant crisis

6. My language here owes much to Spivak's readings of Marx and her critique of Derrida's "misreading" of industrial capital as a kind of interest (Spivak 1988: 173) or usury (Spivak 1993: 97).

7. Elsewhere (Anagnost 1997: 7), I have noted the neat contemporaneity of China's opening to global markets with the reorganization of capitalism. The "just in time" provision of a cheap and docile labor force to a capitalist system almost overwhelmed by internal contradictions provides an ironic reversal of the Marxist historical narrative: socialism *will have been* the necessary antithesis for capitalism to evolve to its next stage. The irony of the future perfect tense cautions against any narrative that assures the triumph of capitalism is due to its intrinsic superiority; it suggests that the "end of history" will in turn generate its own crises. The "once existing socialisms" become, in a sense, a prosthetic supplement that staves off the crises internal to capitalism. Making a similar point, Wang Hui (1998: 12) suggests that "the Chinese reforms have also contributed in unknowable and unspecifiable ways to the developmental direction of global capitalism itself." My argument here responds to this call for new ways to conceptualize the ongoing effects of this conjuncture and how Marx can speak to the new challenges of our present.

management, the falling rate of profit engendered by its internal relations (Spivak 1988; Castree 1996/97). In China's postsocialist development, collectivized property and the populations whose livelihood once depended upon it both become potential sources of surplus value (as capital and labor). The newly privatized sphere of market relations colludes with the power relations of the post-Mao state to rechannel value into various kinds of entrepreneurial capital.[8] Uprooted from collectivized agriculture, China's migrant labor becomes the condition of possibility for capitalism's renewal even as it represents the antithesis of development. I cannot help noting this tremendous irony and the possibility it offers as a starting point for critique.

The power of *suzhi* to derogate migrant bodies is closely tied to its application to differently valued bodies. This is what gives it its power as a value coding. A *code* differs from the concept of language developed by Ferdinand de Saussure by referring more explicitly to the political dimension of language.[9] The ideological function of the code often works through the figure of antithesis (the difference between good or bad, rich or poor, lacking or having quality, being civilized or uncivilized). The antithesis is inherently a coercive figure in the divide it enforces; it constructs a "grid of abstract categories" that works as a "proliferating series of exclusive disjunctive syntheses adding up to a system of value judgment" (Massumi 1992: 76). This grid is an *apparatus of capture* that reproduces the social balance of power. The coerciveness of the code does not necessarily prevent movement from one side to the other. Indeed, hopes of crossing over the divide surface in the neoliberal fables of self-making that recycle the traditional Chinese genre of "tales of famous men" (*ming ren zhuan*). These stories circulate powerfully in reform-era China alongside an equally pervasive anxiety about downward mobility, which for laid-off state-sector workers is all too immediate.[10]

8. This complex interlacing of market opportunity and official power means that the "liberation" of entrepreneurial capital often takes quasi-legal forms that border on political corruption. The hemorrhaging of resources from state-owned or collective factories is the cause of much unrest among workers who have been laid off (*xia gang*) from these "failed" production units. *Shengsi juece* [Fatal decision], a feature-length, anticorruption propaganda film, dramatized the illegality of this sort of pillaging and was required viewing for all party officials in fall 2000.

9. Also see Massumi 1992: 187–88, n. 34 for the distinction between language and code.

10. I was somewhat startled to discover in 1999, alongside such obvious choices as the Chinese translation of Bill Gates's *The Road Ahead*, numerous retranslations of the works of Samuel Smiles, the nineteenth-century characterologist. One is reminded of Timothy Mitchell's (1988: 108–10) discussion of how Smiles's work became disseminated throughout the colonized world (in China and Japan as well as in Egypt) as a discursive technology of modern subject production. These books by Smiles are now "all the rage" among readers in their twenties, as one youthful and enthusiastic informant told me.

In thinking of *suzhi* as a kind of value coding, I am using "value" to read *suzhi* against the grain. Here, I follow Gayatri Spivak's (1999: 110) exploration of value as a concept-metaphor that can be used as a "deconstructive lever" to critique capitalist culture at a number of levels: the economic, the politicocognitive (i.e., the power/knowledge of the state apparatus), and the production of affective value within the family. Spivak's notion of "value coding" draws selectively on a theoretical vocabulary from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (1983). Their figuring of flows and (re)territorializations lends itself well to Spivak's conceptualization of the fluidity and insubstantiality of the value form, although she prefers the metaphor of textuality to that of fluid mechanics for "opening up" value in a way that refuses metaphors of substance. More importantly, the notion of value coding enables Spivak to line up Marx's value concept alongside Michel Foucault's conceptualization of power and Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization of desire: all three are similar figures (what she refers to as *catachreses*—ill-fitting words that must be made to make do) that transcode one another and thereby enable an expanded analysis of capitalist society that can be read across its discontinuities.

Suzhi suggests a particularly powerful discourse of value coding that effectively masks the transfer of value from one category of bodies to another. In the privatized site of middle-class nurture, the child's singularity, enforced by the state's one-child policy, stands in marked contrast to the thronging masses of migrant laborers and the specter of social disorder they arouse.[11] The intensification of parental investment is meant to ensure the child's difference from the derogated body of the migrant.[12] The quality of the child is what assures the urban middle class of its distance from the backward masses of China's hinterlands; while in the political calculus of the state, the masses exemplify the lack for which the high-quality child becomes a supplement. Here we see how *suzhi* enables a

11. China's one-child family policy, which began in the late 1970s and early 1980s, has achieved the ideal of the *sankou jiating* (the family of two parents with one child) much more effectively in urban and peri-urban areas than in the remote hinterlands. This has unwittingly resulted in an interesting reversal of the classic eugenicist position that encourages reproduction among well-educated urban populations. Women are asked not to reproduce more but to intensify reproduction by improving the quality of their only child. They are asked to embrace their maternal role as the necessary supplement to what is lacking in Chinese modernity.

12. This anxiety of internal differentiation is in tension with the anxiety that one's child "match" the embodied competencies of transnationally mobile subjects produced in other national contexts of nurture. Hence, the project is to produce child-subjects who in the future will be able to stand up to the challenges of globalization (intensified competition, the need for perpetual retraining, and the requirement of entrepreneurial creativity, risk taking, and cultural border crossing).

transcoding of economic value into a system of social distinctions that achieves its fullest expression in the newly interiorized space of civilized urban domesticity and its production of affective value. The living labor of the migrant body is derogated in relation to a body whose productive potentiality is fully developed through intensifying standards of middle-class nurture. In other words, the dominant rhetoric of neoliberal developmentalism becomes internalized as a fable of self-making, what Colin Gordon (1991: 44) calls the "entrepreneurialization of the self," in the production of human capital.

What became of particular interest to me while interviewing urban middle-class subjects about the meanings of *suzhi* was their apparent inability to anchor *suzhi* with any kind of fixed meaning. This indeterminacy of meaning became at times a kind of mutually recognized joke (I would ask my subjects to define it, and they would laughingly affirm their inability to do so), but it is also strongly suggestive of how *suzhi* operates as a kind of floating signifier, or the holding of a differential, as it traverses the complex terrain of economic, social, and political relationships. The emptiness of *suzhi* is perhaps most easily seen in discourses of educational reform. The Chinese Internet is full of Web sites in which teachers and educational experts attempt to fill in their visions of what "quality education" (*suzhi jiaoyu*) means in response to calls by the central government for reform. However, it is this very insubstantiality of *suzhi* that allows it to stand in for a differential separating the middle class from its other. What then are we to make of such an impasse? Is it forcing the issue to insist on making the linkage and to read one's respondents' disavowal as a telling symptom? If the figures of the migrant and the child become ghostly doubles of each other, the difficulty experienced by my respondents in making this linkage attests to the power of *suzhi* as a value coding that can effectively maintain a desired separation between them.[13] The migrant laborer who camps out in the bottom floor of the apartment tower he is constructing subsequently disappears upon its completion as a gated space. Prospective home buyers carefully vet the level of *suzhi* of their neighbors before making a purchase. The demolition of migrant housing is a disavowal of the necessary presence of the migrant in the global city. In the mapping of cosmopolitan urban space, the figure of the migrant is continually sought as an absence.

In imagining the figures of the child and migrant as inversions of each other,

13. In drawing attention to this pairing, I must make clear that the migrant can at best be only a shadowy figure in my text, given that my ethnographic research has focused primarily on middle-class nurture. In speaking of the migrant and her or his lived reality, I necessarily depend on the ethnographic writing of others, especially Yan Hairong (2003a, 2003b) and Pun Ngai (2003).

the value chain that includes both the extraction of economic surplus value from the laborer's body and the material efforts of parents who seek to produce embodied value in their child may be too dispersed to track. Or conversely, as Spivak argues, the attempt to track it must negotiate the discontinuities of what is not in fact a unified system of internal relations. Value is not, as Noel Castree (1996/97: 62) points out, "a metamorphosing social substance that, like a golden thread, weaves its way from content(s) to form(s) and so shows that what appears as a multiplicity of different elements is really an integral, bounded, discrete totality." The temptation to see value as a transfer of substance from one body to another comes from its promise of giving the theorist a magisterial, all-encompassing view of capitalism as a totality. Castree's "golden thread" stitches off a closed set of internal relations by which capitalism encompasses the world, stripping it of its relation to a constitutive outside—for example, the patriarchal relations of the family (what Spivak [1988: 163] calls the whole "dynamics of birth-growth-family-life reproduction") or those modes of value production that capitalism must actively produce at its margins, such as "underdevelopment" or the "Third World." One secures this vision of totality at the risk of obscuring discontinuities and heterogeneities in transactions of value, as between the production of economic value and the political calculations of the state or between jockeying for class position in the social sphere and the production of affective value within the family. For value to work as a concept-metaphor that can track these movements, it must be opened up as a kind of differential, a floating placeholder that takes us from a metaphor of substance to one of textuality.

This conception of value speaks forcefully to the project of tracking *suzhi* as a kind of value coding that moves from embodied value to power to desire. The extraction of a representational surplus value in defining the superior quality of the child against the migrant's lack thus seems much more graspable as a project of culture critique. Moreover, this representational effect works at multiple levels: the economic valuation of migrant labor, the production of a system of coded social distinctions (the markers of bodily quality and consumer taste), and the politicocognitive power of the state to recognize only bodies of value as worthy of full political citizenship. The linking of *suzhi* to these two figures thereby constitutes a circuit, or a complex feedback loop, among differentiated levels.

Spivak (1993: 76) develops this point in reference to Marx's notion of "the Total or Expanded Form of Value," which she sees as critical to understanding capital logics:

> In the analysis of contemporary capitalism in the broadest sense, taking patriarchy (traffic in affective value-coding) and neocolonialism (traffic in

> epistemic-cognitive-political-institutional value-coding) into account, it is "the Total or Expanded Form of Value," where "the series of [the] representation [of value] never comes to an end," which "is a motley mosaic of disparate and unconnected expressions," where the endless series of expressions are all different from each other, and where, "the totality has no single unified form of appearance." (Quoted passages within are from Marx; inserted text in square brackets belongs to Spivak.)

Elsewhere, she describes what this conceptualization of an expanded form of value allows us to do:

> If we dissociate the total or expanded form from a necessarily economic coding, we can see the family resemblance, the structural similarity, indeed the discursive continuity, of the two concept-metaphors: "value" (or "worth," *Wert* in Marx), "power" in Foucault, and "desire" in the Deleuze and Guattari of *Anti-Oedipus*. . . . In the total or expanded form, it is the myriad and heterogeneous possibilities of value-coding that constitute the field. Chains of value-coding become meaningful, constitute exchange, and disperse, even as poles of resistance articulate themselves in or as the socius. The so-called phenomenality of resistance has its being by virtue of discursive formations as much as value is expressed as different substantive contents by different forms of appearance. (Spivak 1999: 105)

Let us put on hold for a moment the relation between discursive formations and the phenomenality of resistance and turn to the question of whether we can, in fact, glimpse how chains of value coding constitute a system of exchanges. The ghostly doubling of migrant and child in a news report on China's emerging middle class nicely captures the extension of value coding to the affective and politicocognitive registers (Dong, Wei, and Li 2001).[14] The story features a portrait of a married couple of urban professionals living in Shenzhen and their tastefully decorated apartment. The presence of a cherished three-year-old is described as the pivot of this affective universe, which is followed by a discussion of the importance of the growing middle class to maintaining social stability. The way in which the affective value of the child is balanced in this account against the specter of social disorder references, albeit indirectly, "a discursive system of marginality" (Spivak 1993: 62) that marks the body of the migrant as the source of social instability. Marginality marks a heterogeneity that is increasingly built into the order of things—a necessary dif-

14. While this was a report written in English for a Hong Kong newspaper, the issues it raises about the emergent middle class are consistent with recent discussions published in China.

ference that nonetheless also poses a threat. Reports such as this one, which dwell in loving detail on what is still a relatively small segment of the population, become an anticipatory staging of a middle class that is desired intensely but has not yet come into view as a hegemonic social force. This intense desire for a middle class is not just individual but political, especially given the state's urgency to maintain social order during the ongoing transformation of Chinese society: the transformation of the political order into a kind of autonomization of the political realm, a "governing at a distance." This desire is cultivated through mass-entertainment genres that stage scenes of both bourgeois comfort *and* lower-class criminality (e.g., "true crime" television dramas), in which the family is represented as a site of class production that must be coded as civilized or uncivilized. The nascent middle class is rendered visible through news reports such as the one I discussed; through televisual fantasy, advertising, and other mass-cultural media that incite the desire for middle-class status; and through discipline, training, and "smart" consuming.[15] To know how to consume appropriately is to participate in a highly coded realm of social distinctions where consumption both constructs the body of value and establishes its distance from its other.

In what sense, then, is *suzhi* a corporeal politics? Is this merely a methodological convenience resolving the insubstantiality of value as a concept-metaphor—a supplemental corporeality for something that has no body but is merely a form of appearance? Yet it would seem that the body—or if not the body as such, then Agamben's "bare life"—provides a common substrate that underlies both the Chinese state's strategies for developing the latent potentialities of the masses and the absorption of the individual in technologies of the self, in which care of the body becomes an obsessive focus of bourgeois consumption—an intensification of the body *as* a site of investment. The body comes to represent a virtuality (usually phrased in *suzhi* discourse as a latent potential) that must be channeled according to selected circuits of value production. If, in the calculation of value, "the economic is the most abstract and rational instance" (Spivak 1999: 104), then the body is what is seized upon in the coding of social, political, and affective value. The body comes to substantiate the abstract economic realm as a site where the multiple processes that engender and otherwise differentiate categories of embodied labor converge.

15. This notion of an "anticipatory staging" of the middle-class interior as a figure of modernity is limited not just to colonial and postcolonial contexts but was there from the very beginning of the emergence of a middle class in nineteenth-century Europe (Thompson 1996: 7; Armstrong 1987: 9). The anticipation of a modernity that has not quite arrived may be distinctive of a temporality premised on the progressive movement of history.

Agamben (1999) identifies *potentiality* as a possibility that exists but has not yet been actualized. The idea of "capacity" defines a potentiality. A capacity is what the body will be made to be capable of, given the right conditions for bringing this latent possibility into the realm of human activity. In the discourse of neoliberalism, this latent capacity represents a further frontier for the expansion of capitalist accumulation. The latent capacities of the human body are expressible in a rhetoric of development. It is self-development that "qualifies" neoliberal subjects, so that the actualization of the body's latent potentialities becomes an expression of value. Viewed positively, this self-development may be seen as the actualization of human possibility—the achievement of a telos of creativity that achieves its fullest expression. However, in a more critical light, we might also recognize this development as opening the body to a regime of exploitation perhaps unparalleled in human history.

In neoliberal economic logics, this latent potentiality of the body as a body for exploitation is unleashed by the positioning of the subject at the edge of a precipice, through the threat of a failure to be recognized as a body of value or even annihilation of the body's very existence due to unsafe labor conditions. In other words, not only does potentiality define capacities that are expressed in the usual sense of being the product of education and training, but there is a superexploitation of the body through an expansion of what it can be made to tolerate in terms of work discipline and stress. A purely economic calculus fails to take into account this factor of production in the wear and tear of bodies when comprehensive health care or safe labor conditions are suddenly no longer affordable. Moreover, what should be recognized—indeed, what must be recognized for the sake of any politics of resistance—is that the same logic that governs the body of value also governs the body that lacks value. Both live under constant threat, although their struggles for survival are clearly unequal in terms of the risks of failure (bodily dismemberment and possibly death for the body without value).

In other words, neoliberal economic rationality can achieve its utopic actualization only at the expense of uncalculated and perhaps incalculable human costs, in which "bare life" itself—the vitality of the body—is expended in place of other factors of production. Nowhere is this clearer than in a statement made by a Chinese factory manager who suggested that it is easier to replace workers than to upgrade the safety features of the machinery they operate.[16] The body without

16. The factory manager's comment about an industrial accident in which a worker's hand was severed can be found in Fackler 2002. The body's latent potentialities become a new frontier for the expansion of capitalism in its neoliberal form. Ironically, opening this new frontier as a source of surplus value in some respects mirrors the mass mobilizations of the Great Leap Forward. Then as now,

value is a derogated body not just in the realm of representation but also in the realm of material embodiment. The loss of a hand is the taking away of a part so as to impair. It is a brutally concrete expression of the severing of the laboring body from its capacity to engage in manual labor—a form of annihilation. In the site of domestic nurture, we see how maternal labor also enters the realm of incalculable costs through the intensification of child nurture, where the family is forced to absorb the costs of a new calculus of value and the terror of having one's only child fail.

The reduction of the body to "bare life"—a mere potentiality that must be developed—speaks forcefully to the hegemonic power of developmentalism as the basis for state power. Agamben (1998: 7) sees "bare life" as the point where the two faces of power developed in Foucault's thought converge: the political techniques through which "the State assumes and integrates the care of the natural life of individuals into its very center"; and the technologies of the self "by which processes of subjectivization bring the individual to bind himself to his own identity and consciousness and, at the same time, to an external power." The two together appear to present an irresolvable paradox in the simultaneous production of subjective individualization and objective totalization of the power of the state, which may in fact achieve its fullest realization not in the abortive fascist or socialist states of the past but in the neoliberal triumphalism now rapidly holding sway worldwide. The subject's freedom to refashion him- or herself as a body of value locates the calculus of the market within the very heart of the subject.

While noting how modern state rationality serves as a precondition of capitalism, Agamben never really deals with the realm of the economic and its possible calculations of the value of bare life. It is ironic that Foucault locates the emergence of governmentality as contemporaneous with the separation of the economy as an autonomous, self-regulating realm.[17] It may well be that a rethinking of the value form provides an important critical link connecting Foucault's exploration of the valuation of life in the calculus of the state with Marx's theorization of economic value.

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the latent potentiality of marginal utilities is opened for exploitation (elderly grannies moving earth by shoulder pole, the building of terraced fields on upper slopes)—and with similarly catastrophic results. But there is a difference. The 1990s have seen a rapid increase in industrial injuries and deaths alongside the erosion of collective welfare and health-care provision.

17. See Buck-Morss 1995 for a history of the emergence of the economic as an imaginary that works (in the sense of its having a performative effect) on the real.

Indeed, the political calculus of the neoliberal state is based on the premise that the market is *not* in fact a natural system of relations but a realm that must be shaped by policy to encourage the development of entrepreneurial forms (Lemke 2001: 196). This project requires reworking "the biopolitical from below" (Negri and Hardt 2002) in the production of neoliberal subjects, consumer citizenship, and new modes of social differentiation. The legitimacy of the neoliberal state is based on the production of economic prosperity rather than on notions of historical progress (Lemke 2001: 196). This perhaps explains why the language of social analysis in 1990s China has undergone a discursive shift from Marxian notions of class (*jieji*) to the sociological analysis of social strata (*jieceng*), a more subtly variegated set of categories characterized as much by new modes of social distinction, education, and consumer taste as by economic status. In Foucault's discussions of the Ordo-liberals in postwar Germany, we see how neoliberal governmentality is intent on breaking up the "homogenizing trends of mass society" in the production of social difference (Lemke 2001: 195). As one interviewee expressed this shift to me, *class* conveys a sense of social antagonism, but she envisions social strata as a ladder she can climb up.

In this subtly graded schema of social differentiation, life itself becomes calculable as human capital. Under neoliberalism, Colin Gordon (1991: 44) suggests:

> Human capital is composed of two components, an innate component of bodily and genetic equipment, and an acquired component of aptitudes produced as a result of investment in the provision of appropriate environmental stimuli: nurture, education, etc. Economically, an aptitude is defined as a quasi-machine for the production of value; this applies not only to the production of commodities, but also to the production of satisfactions [the educational benefits of logical discourse, an appreciation for the arts, etc.] . . . considered economically akin to a consumer durable which has the peculiarity of being inseparable from its owner [hence materially substantiated by a body]. From this point of view, then, the individual producer-consumer is in a novel sense not just an enterprise, but the entrepreneur of himself or herself.

It not surprising, then, that as employment in China is increasingly threatened by massive layoffs, discourses of self-development (*ziwo fazhan*) have become ubiquitous. Here the stakes appear quite clearly to players as a desperate struggle determining success or failure. Despite the state's avowed goal of "raising the quality of the people as a whole" (*tigao renmin de suzhi*), the fact remains that the educational channels that endow bodies with *suzhi* are too narrow to accommo-

date more than a small segment of the population.[18] The term *taotai* means to cull, and its modern meaning is inseparably bound to the notion of the survival of the fittest in Chinese translations of nineteenth-century evolutionary theory. The idea of being culled is now applied to all sorts of situations that may begin as early as preschool, the first step toward securing middle-class status. However, *taotai* is also used to convey the economic struggle among nation-states and fears about China's global competitiveness with its entry into the World Trade Organization.[19]

Increasingly, what marks the body as a body of value are those competencies identified as intellectual capital in a knowledge-based economy. Hence, the double-sided nature of *suzhi* discourse marks out a difference between the reliance of one class on physical labor and that of another on intellectual labor. One cannot help but place these two figurations of *suzhi* alongside the contrast that Spivak draws between two opposing predications of the subject in the history of Western metaphysics (the ground upon which subjectivity is thinkable). The idealist predication of the subject is grounded on consciousness ("the subject's irreducible intendedness towards the object"), while the materialist predication of the subject is grounded on labor power ("the subject's superadequation," its ability to produce "a greater value than it costs itself") (Spivak 1988: 154). Elsewhere, Spivak suggests that the concept-metaphor "value" has different senses within these mutually exclusive conceptions of the subject. "Truth," "Beauty," and "Goodness" are "the three value spheres: cognitive, aesthetic, ethical in the realm of cultural value." These three anchor enduring universal values on the one hand in contrast with that "slight, contentless" thing on the other, a "mediating . . . differential which can never appear on its own" but which enables us to see the link between living labor and the commodity in exchange (Spivak 1990: 96). Spivak's question, then, is what value becomes when it is posed as a materialist subject predication. The argument that the commodity's exchange value is abstracted from living labor enables the worker or the "Third World" subject to recognize "that it produces both the wealth and the possibility of cultural self-representation of the 'First World,'" and reverses the hegemonic understanding that development is something the First World must help the Third World do (Spivak 1990: 96–97).

In a somewhat earlier formulation of this opposition, Spivak suggests that capital "must provide itself with the mind of one class of human beings and the body

18. This is of course what propels the accelerating commodification of education I observed in China in 2000.

19. I am indebted to Yan Hairong (personal communication) for information about the social Darwinist meaning of *taotai* and its circulation in discourses about global competition.

of the other." The mind of the capitalist class is appropriated as the conscious bearer of the movement of capital—"capital personified and endowed with consciousness and a will" (Spivak 1987: 52; the quoted phrase is from Marx). The body of the working class is appropriated for its superadequation, the surplus value it produces. Let us note, if only briefly, the monstrousness of capital that has "no proper being" of its own but lives only through a kind of body snatching.[20] What I want to stress is how these opposing predications of the subject—as mind and as body—parallel the two poles of *suzhi*, the laboring body of the rural migrant and the embodied intellectual capabilities of an emergent middle class.

Spivak's identification of this split in the theory of the subject and her concept of value coding enable us to keep both production and consumption in focus. The scandal of economic exploitation takes place in the space of this discontinuity hidden from view. At the same time, it is necessary to see how the discourse of *suzhi* as a marking out of bodies of value or its lack becomes in itself the means to negotiate the relation between capitalism and its outside, in its solicitation of the migrant, her desire to escape rurality, and her pursuit of the commodities that can mark her as a "city girl."[21] This discussion of *suzhi* is intended not only as a counternarrative to the way it circulates in Chinese society but also as an intervention into scholarly discussions of consumer revolutions in China (and elsewhere) that allow the moment of production and its exploitative violence to sink from sight.[22]

Before concluding, we must return to Spivak's suggestion that "the so-called phenomenality of resistance has its being by virtue of discursive formations as much as value is expressed as different substantive contents by different forms of appearance." If, according to Foucault, power and resistance are each the limit of the other, then the particular modalities out of which moments of resistance emerge are themselves conditioned on the power of *suzhi* discourse and its limits, not to mention the potential of these moments to give birth to subject-effects that were never intended by the logics of neoliberal policies. The efforts of migrant women to embody *suzhi* unavoidably generate "inadvertent" pedagogies: moments of paradox or "perplexity" that open up quite different imaginative possibilities.[23] The women migrants discussed by Yan Hairong (2003a, 2003b) and Pun Ngai

20. See Anagnost n.d. for further discussion of the vampiric commodity.

21. Yan (2003a, 2003b) and Pun (2003) capture quite vividly how the discourse of *suzhi* comes to index the project of "self-development."

22. See Wang 2001 and Pun 2003 for critiques of this notion of the consumer revolution as a necessarily democratizing movement.

23. I am indebted to Priti Ramamurthy (2003) for her development of the "perplexities" of consumption as a space for critical reflection.

(2003) knowingly face hardships and physical pain not just for a monetary wage but as an escape from the developmental dead-end of their home in the country. As Yan (2003a) notes (following Spivak), the "spectralization of the rural" in China's economic reforms has meant its annihilation as a place from which value can be derived. However, when their efforts to affirm themselves as bodies of value are misrecognized by others as indelibly bearing the mark of the rural, as a kind of masquerade, a pathetic mimicry, these moments may be experienced as revelatory, inciting these women to give voice to their experience and leading, in some cases, to the formation of support networks and advocacy groups.[24] Likewise, middle-class women confront a "fissuring of the modernity project" (Rofel 1999) in conflicting incitements toward self-development *and* self-sacrifice. In some cases, women feel so daunted by the responsibility of building quality into their only child that they may refuse motherhood, and even marriage, as measures of their value (Anagnost n.d.).

In conclusion, I wish to return to the opening epigraph and Spivak's desire to reinvest the "sign-value" of socialism as a call to social responsibility. To raise the specter of socialism as a site of political possibility is to risk being dismissed as being out-of-joint with the times or hopelessly nostalgic for a revolutionary telos that has proved illusory. And yet this very negation of history, it seems to me, is fundamental to the very neoliberal logics I wish to critique: the idea that the past must be cleared away for an unimpeded restructuring of every social sphere according to an economic rationality. Therefore, in evoking socialism, my intent is to suggest that it is not a proper name but is rather an imaginative space that exists in relation to capitalism as a constantly mutating set of relations. Spivak suggests that socialism *could be* described as a call to responsibility. This call for responsibility is not necessarily a renewed call for class warfare. Indeed, a critical perspective on neoliberalism allows us to see how even those who hold relatively privileged positions within the new economic order are no less caught up in a competitive struggle for survival that puts the subject permanently at the brink of a chasm. Rather, the call for responsibility should be directed toward preserving and expanding the fund of collective good that neoliberal forces are

24. Pun (2003: 485) describes what happens when the factory women in her study dress up in their best jeans and T-shirts to tour the Splendid China theme park in Shenzhen, only to be told by middle-class tourists that they should get back to their proper place in the factory. In addition to migrant laborer advocacy groups pushing for safer working conditions, among other concerns, one must also look to the growing demonstrations of protest by laid-off state-sector workers. The derogation of their value has everything to do with the reorganization of governmental logics and the representation of state-sector industries as failed enterprises.

rapidly eroding. We need a political ethics that recognizes an expanded notion of the good life: one that is not merely limited to the logic of consumption but acknowledges a larger social responsibility.

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