On the Reality and Construction of Hyperobjects with Reference to Class

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In A Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre’s Critique of Dialectical Reason, Joseph Catalano writes:

For Sartre, the reality of class is more than a subjective awareness that we are united with others and less than a supraconsciousness in which we all already share…. We…experience our membership in class, because our class structure already exists as a fundamental structure of our world.¹

From an object-oriented perspective, this is already the wrong way to theorize the existence of class. If class exists, it is not an experience nor the result of an experience (though it can, perhaps, be experienced) nor is it depending on individual persons identifying with a class or recognizing that they are a part of a class. Rather, classes, if they exist, are entities in their own right independent of the members that belong to the class. In mereological terms, classes would be larger scale objects that

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are autonomous or independent of the smaller scale objects from which they are composed.

As such, class would be an example of what Timothy Morton has called a “hyperobject.” As Morton puts it,

Hyperobjects are viscous—they adhere to you no matter how hard you try to pull away, rendering ironic distance obsolete. Now I’ll argue that they are also nonlocal. That is, hyperobjects are massively distributed in time and space such that any particular local manifestation never reveals the totality of the hyperobject.

When you feel raindrops falling on your head, you are experiencing climate, in some sense. In particular you are experiencing the climate change known as global warming. But you are never directly experiencing global warming as such. Nowhere in the long list of catastrophic weather events—which will increase as global warming takes off—will you find global warming.²

As a hyperobject, class is massively distributed in time and space, having no precise location. Moreover, classes are withdrawn from other objects—e.g., the people that “belong” to a particular class—such that we can be entirely unaware of the existence of classes without this impinging, in any way, on the existence or activity of class. Indeed, it is precisely because classes, like any other object, are withdrawn, precisely because they are hyperobjects massively distributed in time and space, that ideology is able to convince us that they don’t exist or that there are only, as Margaret Thatcher notoriously said, ‘individuals’ and families (mid-scale objects of which persons are an instance) that create their own destinies. Here, of course, the term ‘individual’ is placed in scare quotes not because individuals don’t exist, but rather because the term ‘individual’ all too often functions as code for persons alone, ignoring the fact that individuals exist at a variety of different levels of scale. In other words, a class is no less an individual than Jack Abramoff.

While classes are hyperobjects, individuals, or entities in their own right, this does not entail that classes don’t have to be *produced*. Classes are the result of antipraxis, or the material trace of millions of technologies, media, signs, signifiers, natural environmental conditions, infrastructure, and countless human practices that, in their material trace, take on a life of their own, structuring the possibilities and activities of persons embedded within the class.\(^3\) The places where we live, the manner in which roads, public transportation, and infrastructure are organized, the availability of jobs, linguistic dialectics into which one is born, etc., take on a life of their own, structuring and organizing human relations such that the wealthy become more wealthy, children of the wealthy are likely to themselves become wealthy, the poor and middle class remain poor and middle class, and so on. There is a whole spatio-temporal geography here, a network structure, mesh, or ecology, around which classes emerge as entities in their own right and perpetually reproduce themselves.

Class, as an entity in its own right, comes to function as a *statistical sorting machine* as its endo-structure\(^4\) functions as a regime of attraction\(^5\) setting up something like a gravitational or attractive field for those persons or human bodies

\(^3\) For a discussion of Sartre’s concept of ‘antipraxis,’ cf. Levi R. Bryant, ‘Antipraxis,’ November 18, 2010, at http://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2010/11/18/antipraxis/. Antipraxis refers to products of human labor or activity that take on a life of their own, becoming features of the human environment that persons must navigate and that have a teleology or counter-finality that was not what human agents intended. In this regard, Sartre’s concept of antipraxis shares much resemblance to McLuhan’s mediums or Latour’s nonhuman technologies.

\(^4\) The endo-structure of an object is its internal structure or organization considered apart from other entities in the world.

\(^5\) A regime of attraction is a set of relations between or among objects that leads them to actualize themselves in a particular way. For example, because of the nature of gravity on earth, fire burns upwards towards the sky. The regime of attraction here involves the relationship of the fire to the planet earth. By contrast, if fire breaks out on the international space station it flows and roils like water because the gravitational pull of the earth is significantly diminished.
that find themselves within its orbit, channeling them into certain patterned relations with respect to one another. An object functions as an autopoietic machine when it draws flows from other entities producing outputs so as to reproduce itself. In the case of class, the flows upon which classes draw to reproduce themselves in the order of time are humans, resources, and technologies. The output these machines produce are the manner in which human beings are formed at the affective, cognitive, and even the physiological level and patterned relations between humans. Although classes are one object and individual humans another, classes nonetheless function as a regime of attraction by both affording and constraining human action in a variety of ways. Just as one cannot walk through the windshield of one’s car, class becomes an object, a vector of resistance and affordance, that persons must navigate.

Just as every object is a system that transforms perturbations into system-specific events, contents, or qualities according to its own endo-structure, classes treat human bodies as perturbations that they then mold and structure according to their own endo-structure.6 Along the beautiful beach in Nagshead, North Carolina where I spent much of my childhood, you will find a band of sea shells and small, polished stones distributed in a precise line across the shore. This band of sea shells is the result of a regime of attraction structured around ocean life and geology offshore, the incline of the sea shore, the specific force of the waves pounding against the shore in that location and nowhere else, and so on, generating a machine or system that picks up sea shells and stones of this particular size and shape (no smaller and no larger) distributing them at this particular point on the beach. This is how it is with class. The field of antipraxis, millions of small decisions, actions, technologies, infrastructures, natural

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conditions, etc., sort human bodies in particular patterns, reinforcing boundaries between them negentropically, both affording and constraining possibilities of relation between these bodies.

The question, then, of how we experience or are conscious of class, of whether or not we identify with class or recognize ourselves as being a part of a class, is distinct from the question of how and whether class exists. Class can exist and function just fine without anyone identifying with a class or being aware that they are caught up within the mechanisms of class. How else could so many act contrary to their class interests, going so far as to even deny that class exists, if this were not the case? Rather, the question of our experience and consciousness of class is a question of how we can become aware of the regime of attraction within which we are enmeshed such that we can begin to act on it to change it rather than merely being acted upon it behind our backs. Here the issue is similar to the one Morton raises with respect to climate as a hyperobject. Part of the problem with climate is that precisely because it is withdrawn we aren’t even aware of its existence and therefore are unable to act on it. We are aware of weather without being aware of the hyperobject climate of which weather is a local manifestation. Climate requires a sort of leap and detective work that ferrets all sorts of traces allowing us to finally infer its existence. So too in the case of class.

Yet how are hyperobjects like class constructed or built? How do they come into existence? We have already seen reference to antipraxis and regimes of attraction, yet these abstract concepts need to be rendered more concrete. Despite the fact that Latour nowhere, to my knowledge, references Sartre or the concept of antipraxis, it would not be misguided to suggest that the central theme of Latour’s sociology is the investigation of antipraxis or how nonhuman actors such as technologies contribute to patterned relations among humans and nonhumans. Above all, Latour denounces the idea of the social as a sort of stuff, emphasizing the manner in which the social must be built or constructed through a variety of different agencies. Here there is strong resonance
between the later Sartre and Latour, for as Sartre remarks, “man is ‘mediated’ by things to the same extent as things are ‘mediated’ by man.” To explain the social is thus to explain these mediations which form particular associations and generate enduring entities. As Latour will later remark,

In most situations, we use ‘social’ to mean that which has already been assembled and acts as a whole, without being too picky on the precise nature of what has been gathered, bundled, and packaged together. When we say that ‘something is social’ or ‘has a social dimension,’ we mobilize one set of features that, so to speak, march in step together, even though it might be composed of radically different types of entities. This unproblematic use of the word is fine so long as we don’t confuse the sentence “Is social what goes together?,” with the one that says, “social designates a particular kind of stuff” [my emphasis]. With the former we simply mean that we are dealing with a routine state of affairs whose binding together is the crucial aspect, while the second designates a sort of substance whose main feature lies in its differences with other types of materials. We imply that some assemblages are built out of social stuff instead of physical, biological, or economical blocks, much like the houses of the Three Little Pigs were made of straw, wood, and stone.8

The central target of Latour’s actor-network-theory (ANT) is what he calls ‘the sociology of the social.’ The sociology of the social would be that form of sociology that suggests that the social is composed of a special sort of ‘stuff’ (‘social stuff,’ not unlike phlogiston) that holds people together in a particular way. Generally sociologists of the social appeal to power, social forces, ideas, signs, language, norms, representations, and human intentions as the stuff that holds the social together.

By contrast, Latour argues that all of these agencies are rather weak and fail to account for why the social (assem-

blages of humans and nonhumans) are held together in the way they’re held together. In place of the sociology of the social, Latour instead proposes a sociology of associations. The social, for Latour, is nothing more than associations between human and nonhuman entities (and sometimes, many times, is composed solely of associations between nonhuman entities that include semiotic components, human intentions, norms, laws, but also technologies, animals, microbes, natural entities like rivers and mountains, etc. Objects are thus constructed or built out of other objects. As Graham Harman puts it in *Guerrilla Metaphysics*,

We have a universe made up of objects wrapped in objects wrapped in objects. The reason we call these objects ‘substances’ is not because they are ultimate or indestructible, but simply because none of them can be identified with any (or even all) of their relations with other entities. None of them is a pristine kernel of substantial unity unspoiled by interior parts. We never reach some final layer of tiny components that explains everything else, but enter instead into an indefinite regress of parts and wholes. Every object is both a substance and a complex of relations.⁹

Objects are built out of other objects, they are emergent from other objects, yet also take on an internal structure of their own that renders them independent from or irreducible to the objects out of which they are built. Indeed, the smaller objects out of which a larger object is composed can often be destroyed and replaced while the larger object continues to exist. Causal redundancy arguments argue that the activity of an object is nothing but the activity of the smaller objects of which it is composed, therefore allowing us to dismiss the existence of the larger scale object altogether. However, the central point here is that the larger scale objects have powers and capacities that can nowhere be found in the smaller scale objects composing the object.¹⁰


¹⁰ For a critique of eliminativist causal redundancy arguments, cf. Amie
Latour will argue that it is nonhuman actors or objects that do the lion’s share of the work in associating human beings in particular ways with one another in social assemblages, and that signs, intentions, representations, ideas, norms, laws, etc., while contributing to the formation of these assemblages or objects, are weak tea in maintaining the patterned relations in assemblages or associations between humans. As Latour writes,

A shepherd and his dog remind you nicely of social relations, but when you see her flock behind a barbed wire fence, you wonder where is the shepherd and her dog—although sheep are kept in the field by the piercing effect of wire barbs more obstinately than by the barking of the dog. There is no doubt that you have become a couch potato in front of your TV set thanks largely to the remote control that allows you to surf from channel to channel—and yet there is no resemblance between the causes of your immobility and the portion of your action that has been carried out by an infrared signal, even though there is no question that your behavior has been permitted by the TV command.

Between a car driver that slows down near a school because she has seen the ‘30 MPH’ yellow sign and a car driver that slows down because he wants to protect the suspension of his car threatened by the bump of a ‘speed trap,’ is the difference big or small? Big, since the obedience of the first has gone through morality, symbols, sign posts, yellow paint, while the other has passed through the same list to which has been added a carefully designed concrete slab. But it is small since they have both obeyed something: the first driver a rarely manifested altruism—if she had not slowed down, her heart would have been broken by the moral law: the second driver to a largely distributed selfishness—if he had not slowed down his suspension would have been broken by a concrete slab [my emphasis]. Should we say that only the first connection is social, moral and symbolic, but that the second is objective and material? No. But, if we say that both are social, how are we going to justify the difference between moral conduct and suspension springs. They might not be social all the way through, but they certainly are collected or associated together by the very work of road designers. One cannot call oneself a social

scientist and pursue only some links—the moral, legal, and symbolic ones—and stop as soon as there is some physical relation interspersed in between the others.\footnote{Latour, Reassembling the Social, 77–78.}

Latour’s point is that if we wish to take account of the fabric of the social, of those assemblages that exist, we have to take into account the role that nonhuman entities play in organizing particular patterns of relations and behavior. Each example contrasts, more or less, a humanist explanation (referent to power, signs, laws, interests, morals, etc) and a nonhumanist explanation. Thus, in the first example, Latour contrasts control of the sheep through power (the role of the shepherd and the sheep dog) and control of the sheep through a barbwire fence. This example is particularly nice because it shows that for the sociology of associations the behavior of sheep is every bit as much a sociological question as the behavior of humans. The second example contrasts human intentions with the unintended consequences of technology (becoming a couch potato). The third example contrasts agency through law and signs with agency through a nonhuman actor such as a speed bump.

At this point we encounter an unexpected point of convergence between the thought of the later Sartre, Latour, and Marshall McLuhan. In Understanding Media Marshall McLuhan famously argues that the essence of media consists in being an extension of man.\footnote{Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994), 7.} A medium is anything that extends the human bodies and senses in one way or another. Crucial to these extensions is that they also transform modes of affectivity, cognition, and social relations, while pushing other things into the background. A car or mountain pass, for McLuhan, is no less a medium than a newspaper. As Ian Bogost and I argue, there is no reason to restrict this concept of media to humans, but rather a medium can be treated as any entity or object that extends another object, whether the object being
extended is a nonhuman object extended by other nonhuman objects, or a nonhuman object extended by a human.\textsuperscript{13} The saturation of the climate with oxygen millions of years ago, for example, extended the domain of certain microbes, just as the street light extends the domain of certain insects. In each of these cases, new associations are formed as a result of these extensions. Likewise, a human can be a medium for another human by extending the first human in a variety of ways as in the case of a congressional member extending the voice of his or her constituents. In this case, the voice of the constituents is clearly transformed such that much of what they say is translated, reformed and lost.

What McLuhan wishes to investigate is the manner in which various media structure relationships among entities, generating a sort of negentropy where pattern is resistant to change. In this respect, signs, texts, technologies, animals, planets, sunlight, films, plants, languages, infrastructure, laws, communication technologies, theories, leaders, partners, universities, symposiums, etc., are all instances of mediums that extend entities in particular ways, structuring patterns of organization among bodies. For example, patterns of urban and suburban sprawl in Georgia and Atlanta perhaps extend or enhance certain weather patterns allowing for stronger tornadoes to form. In \textit{Laws of Media}, Marshall and Eric McLuhan argue that each medium enlarges or enhances the powers of another object, while also limiting or occluding other dimensions of the object.\textsuperscript{14} I will discuss this point in greater detail with respect to class momentarily, but for the moment it suffices to point out that these relations of affording and constraining, enhancing and obscuring, in relations between media (broadly construed) are the fountainhead through which the emergence of hyperobjects are rendered possible.

Returning to Latour, the point is \textit{not} that we should ignore

\textsuperscript{13} Ian Bogost and Levi R. Bryant, \textit{The Pentad: McLuhan and Object-Oriented Ontology}, in preparation.

intentions, laws, signs, morals, etc., not that we should restrict our field of analysis to nonhumans, but that we ought to expand our field of analysis to nonhuman actors such as technologies if we truly wish to understand associations. Along these lines, Latour will argue that nonhuman objects should be treated as full-blown actors in associations or assemblages. As he writes,

The main reason why objects had no chance to play any role before was not only due to the definition of the social used by sociologists, but also to the very definition of actors and agencies most often chosen. If action is limited a priori to what ‘intentional,’ ‘meaningful’ humans do, it is hard to see how a hammer, a basket, a door closer, a cat, a rug, a mug, a list or a tag could act. They might exist in the domain of ‘material’ ‘causal’ relations, but not in the ‘reflexive’ ‘symbolic’ domain of social relations. By contrast, if we stick to our decision to start from the controversies about actors and agencies, then any thing that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor—or, if it has no figuration yet, an actant. Thus the question to ask about any agent is simply the following: Does it make a difference in the course of some other agent’s action or not? Is there some trial that allows someone to detect this difference.15

It is important to understand Latour’s strategy here in proposing that nonhumans are full-blown actors and that action is not the exclusive domain of humans, intentions, the symbolic, and meaning. The point is that absent the role that these other entities play in associations we are unable to understand why social assemblages take the form they take and why they are often so resistant to change. The ideas might very well change, yet the social relations remain the same. This suggests that some other form of agency must be a significant part of the story.

The standard rejoinder to Latour’s proposal to treat nonhumans as actors is that this proposal can only be metaphorical because nonhumans do not act but only behave. Because nonhumans do not have meanings or intentions, the rejoinder

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go, we can only be speaking metaphorically when we say nonhumans act. Nonhumans, the critic continues, can only ‘act’ insofar as humans *project* meaning and intentions on to them. In response to this criticism, Latour’s strategy is not to argue that *nonhuman objects* have intentions and meanings, but to question the degree to which *human actors* have intentions and meanings. As Latour puts it in his essay “A Collective of Humans and Nonhumans” in *Pandora’s Hope*,

What interests me here is the *composition* of action marked by the lines that get longer at each step…. Who performs the action? Agent 1 plus Agent 2 plus Agent 3. Action is a property of *associated entities* [my emphasis]. Agent 1 is allowed, authorized, enabled, afforded by the others. The chimp plus the sharp stick reach (not reaches) the banana. The attribution to one actor of the role of prime mover in no way weakens the necessity of a composition of forces to explain the action. It is by mistake, or unfairness, that our headlines read “Man flies,” “Woman goes into space.” Flying is a property of the whole association of entities that includes airports and planes, launch pads and ticket counters. B-52s do not fly, the U.S. Air Force Flies. Action is simply not a property of humans *but of associations of actants*, and this is the second meaning of technical mediation. Provisional ‘actorial roles’ may be attributed to actants only because actants are in the process of exchanging competences, offering one another new possibilities, new goals, new functions.\(^{16}\)

Just as McLuhan observes, objects afford and constrain one another. Latour’s point here is two-fold: On the one hand, action never occurs in a vacuum, but requires an *assemblage*, a composition of actants to take place at all. As Sartre argues in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, in order to act at all we must transform our body into a material medium so as to act on other material bodies,\(^{17}\) yet in doing so we are in turn acted


\(^{17}\) Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, 82.
upon by the material bodies we act on, but also the products of our productions come to act on us. As Sartre will put it, this is “that terrible aspect of man in which he is the product of his product.”\(^{18}\) On the other hand, and perhaps more importantly, we can’t speak unequivocally about intentions coming from human beings. Did the intention to become a couch potato and channel surfer issue from the man sitting in his lazy boy, or did it issue from the remote, or from the combination of the two? We can’t answer this question. Therefore, in a manner similar to Gilbert Ryle in *The Concept of Mind*, we must, in our social and political theory, first exorcise the ghost in the machine that continues to haunt our social and political thought by treating intentionality and meaning as issuing solely from human agency as a given.

Indeed, how often do people act based on reasons and intentions? Isn’t it rather that we fabricate reasons and intentions after we act as grounds of our actions in the vast majority of instances, such that these reasons and intentions are not grounds of our action, but rather results of our action? Isn’t this precisely what fMRI scans show, where the decision is made prior to us becoming conscious of the action or reasons for the action? If this is the case, then, all things being equal, we should abandon the idea that meaning and intention is the sole domain of humans, as humans never had this capacity to begin with as a given. Just as we no longer speak of a homunculus in the mind, we should abandon the notion that intentions and meanings solely belong to humans.

All of this, of course, gives rise to the question of how human agency is possible. Are we mere puppets of assemblages, or is some sort of self-directing praxis or agency possible? The point here is not that we must reject agency, but rather that we must not cheat and treat something as given and a priori that is not given and a priori. Agency is not something that we have, it is not a given, but rather in a manner strangely resonant with

Badiou’s theory of the subject,\textsuperscript{19} it is something that we must accomplish or produce. Put differently, agency is something rare and unusual, not the norm. It is an accomplishment that must come-to-be, not something that is already there. In this respect, the reasons that we give as grounds for our actions might not genuinely be grounds of those actions, but might indeed become grounds for subsequent actions. In this respect, freedom would be something that emerges retroactively. But more on that another day.

In light of this detour through Latour and McLuhan, we are now in a position to examine the way in which entities like class emerge as hyperobjects. In the \textit{Critique of Dialectical Reason}, Sartre presents an extraordinary example of the role played by nonhumans in the genesis of class, referred to as antipraxis and the practico-intert, or the world of worked matter that takes on an intentionality of its own, quite often at odds of the intentions of those humans that first initiated it, leading to circumstances that humans must adapt to and navigate in the pursuit of their own ends. Antipraxis, the practico-inert, or ‘counter-finality’ structures the possibilities we encounter in our world through a series of material structures that make up the furniture of the environment we must navigate. As Graham Harman recently put it, we “are probably more defined not by the choices we make, but [by] the choices we face.” Antipraxis or the practico-inert is one of the primary ways in which we come to be faced with choices that we did not ourselves choose (in Heideggerese, we’re thrown into it), and therefore functions as a catalytic operator through which new hyperobjects (collective relations) emerge. Thus, in a vein very similar to Harman’s, Sartre writes,

\begin{quote}
At the origin of this membership [in class-being], there are passive syntheses of materiality. And these syntheses represent both general conditions of social activity and our most immediate, crudest, objec-
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\textsuperscript{19} Alain Badiou, \textit{Being and Event}, trans. Oliver Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2005).
Speculations II

tive reality. They already exist; they are simply *crystallised practices* of previous generations: individuals find an existence already sketched out for them at birth; they have their position in life and their personal development assigned to them by their class. What is ‘assigned’ to them is a type of work, and a fundamental *attitude*, as well as a determinate provision of material and intellectual work; it is a strictly limited field of possibilities. Thus Claude Lanzmann is right when he says: “A working woman who earns 25,000 francs a month and contracts chronic eczema by handling Dop shampoo eight hours a day is wholly reduced to her work, her fatigue, her wages and material impossibilities that these wages assign to her: the impossibility of eating properly, of buying shoes, of sending her child to the country, and of satisfying her most modest wishes.” Oppression does not reach the oppressed in a particular sector of their life; it constitutes this life in its totality. They are not people plus needs: they are completely reducible to their needs.20

For Sartre, it is not, as Althusser argues, that the woman as a subject is an effect of ideology, of a ‘hailing,’ that makes her what she is21—which isn’t to say this doesn’t also often take place—but rather that she is caught in the gravitational orbit of another entity, a vampiric, devouring entity, that is a hyperobject or object in its own right: class. Indeed, the woman translates this object, class, in her own unique way, yet she also encounters this object in a manner akin to ocean surf and undertows that continuously restrict her possibilities of actualization and praxis.

Yet what does all this have to do with nonhuman actors? Remember that for Harman, objects are wrapped in objects that are, in their turn, wrapped in other objects. These objects are simultaneously built of *other objects* and that are autonomous from the objects out of which they are constructed. However, we must not forget that objects have to emerge or

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be built and this requires connection or relation between a variety of different objects.

In order for class to exist as an object in its own right there has to be an entire network of human and nonhuman actors that build this object. Later, in the context of the same discussion, Sartre gives a marvelous and harrowing example to illustrate this point. As Sartre observes,

Corresponding to the iron and coal complex there is the so-called ‘universal’ machine. This means a machine—like the lathe in the second half of the nineteenth century—whose function remains indeterminate (in contrast to the specialized machines of automation and semi-automation), and which can do very different jobs provided it is guided, prepared and supervised by a skillful, expert worker. The universality of the machine produces specialization in its servants: it is accessible only to those who know how to use it, and who have therefore had to undergo an often very long apprenticeship. (Conversely, the specialization of the machine, fifty years later, in the period of semi-automation, has brought with it the universalization of its servants: they are interchangeable.) Thus the producer of the machines, through this product and improvement he makes to it, identifies a certain type of men, namely the skilled workers who are capable of carrying out a complete operation from beginning to end, unaided, that is to say, a dialectical praxis.

This practical effect is built into machines themselves in the form of exigency. They reduce specifically physical effort, but require skill. They require that men freed of all secondary labours should devote themselves entirely to them: in this way, they fix, first, the mode of recruitment; then, through the employers, they create employment opportunities and relatively high wages on the labour market; and so a structured future opens up for certain sons of workers [my emphasis], who turn out to have the abilities and means required to become apprentices. (This means sons whose fathers, themselves workers, are in a position to let their sons work for a number of years without being able to support themselves. Generally, the father himself will have to be a skilled worker.) But, in the same process, machines create a lower proletariat which is not only the direct result of the rise of an elite of
better paid workers, who are selected by apprenticeship, but is also directly required by the universal machine, in the form of the ensemble of unskilled workers who, in every workshop, have to be attached to the skilled workers, obey them, and relieve them of all the lowly chores which Others can do for them.22

Sartre’s point here—and it is not intended to be an exhaustive analysis of the emergence of class—is that class is not the result solely of any sort of class experience, class consciousness, sets of intentions and meanings, or identifications, etc., but that class is already inscribed in the nature of the lathe. As Deleuze and Guattari put it, tools never appear in isolation, but already belong to an entire assemblage of relations that gives them their sense and function.23 This new technology that drills, cuts, sands, and shapes demands a particular form of skilled labor. Those who possess this skilled labor come, in the nineteenth century, from those families that apprentice their own sons, passing on this knowledge of ‘lathing.’ As a consequence, as a result of these two actors (and many more besides), the lathe and skilled families, a differentiation of two hyperobjects gradually emerges—skilled and unskilled labor or class—that take on a life of their own distributing the destinies of human bodies behind their backs. Like the plurality of ocean forces I described in relation to the distribution of sea shells on Nagshead Beach, the lathe is a sorting machine, a difference engine, that captures human bodies within a field of forces that sorts them into skilled and unskilled labor. The lathe both extends humans by enabling them to work metal and wood in new ways, but also constrains and affords humans by structuring their relations in a new way. The groups that emerge thus come to embody an inertia, a negentropic mode of reproducing themselves, that human individuals must navigate in their daily life depending on

22 Sartre, Critique of Dialectical Reason, 239–240.
where they fall in the social field.

The concept of hyperobjects invites us to think objects and their interactions at a variety of different levels of scale, ranging from human individuals to larger scale entities such as classes. However, in thinking hyperobjects, we must not merely think the contributions of humans, but also how nonhuman actors contribute to the formation of these entities. This requires us to draw on the contributions of McLuhan, Latour, and object-oriented ontology, examining the manner in which human and nonhuman objects interact, and how they constrain and afford certain forms of patterned relation.