In his book *Nudities*, Giorgio Agamben dedicates an essay to the investigation of the Christian theological category of the glorious body.\(^1\) In the essay, Agamben does not provide the contemporary context to which his essay is responding. This is a common strategy that Agamben employs when he is probing the history of Christian thought: he leaves it to the reader to work out what the implications of his research might be. In this paper, I will argue that “The Glorious Body” should be read in the context of another essay from the text: “Identity without the Person.”\(^2\) The juxtaposition of the two texts shows that Agamben is thinking through possible alternatives to the contemporary situation wherein the state is implementing measures to reduce humans to an identity that is based on biometrics. Biometric reduction goes hand in hand with the project of


neoliberalism, which uses debt as a way of implementing a disciplinary regime.\(^3\) The work of Maurizio Lazzarato, in *The Making of Indebted Man*, will be examined to show how the creation of biometric identity is an important part of the neoliberal project.\(^4\)

Under the mnemotechnics of neoliberalism, human bodily activity must be perpetually directed towards maximizing value in the realm of exchange. It is in “The Glorious Body” that Agamben gives glimpses of what an alternative might look like. A resurrected body in Paradise is one that eschews the reproduction of exchange value and, as a site of inoperativity, is free to seek enjoyment through a use that is held in common.

IDENTITY WITHOUT THE PERSON

In “Identity without the Person,” Agamben looks at changes in the way that identity has been constructed in the West. Through a philological evaluation of *persona*, he shows that identity and personality, throughout much of the West since the time of Rome, was primarily tied to one’s community’s recognition of one’s face/body. “It is hardly surprising that one’s recognition as a person was for millennia one’s most jealously guarded and significant possession. Other human beings are important and necessary primarily because they can recognize me.”\(^5\) The person of the *persona* was originally and

\(^3\) Adam Kotsko, in a recent talk, demonstrated how another text of Agamben’s can also be read as a critique of neoliberalism. Adam Kotsko, "What St. Paul and the Franciscans Can Tell Us About Neoliberalism: On Agamben’s The Highest Poverty" (Paul of Tarsus Interdisciplinary Reading Group: Northwestern University, Chicago, 21 May 2013), Lecture.


\(^5\) Agamben, 47.
primarily a juridical designation. However, *persona* came to take on a moral significance. One’s morality is judged based on the simultaneous nearing and distancing of oneself from one’s socially constructed mask.

With the second half of the nineteenth century, Agamben argues, another development in the recognition of the person occurs. “The necessity of being able to identify with certainty the person arrested for a crime became at this point a necessary condition for a functioning judiciary system.” A person’s immediate relationships were no longer enough to provide the recognition required to provide social accountability.

Agamben focuses on implications for identity that came with the police’s implementation of biometric technology:

For the first time in the history of humanity, identity was no longer a function of the social ‘persona’ and its recognition by others but rather a function of biological data, which could bear no relation to it. ... What now defines my identity and recognizability are the senseless arabesques that my inked-up thumb leaves on a card in some police station. This is something with which I have absolutely nothing to do, something with which and by which I cannot in any way identify myself or take distance from: naked life, a purely biological datum.

The remainder of the essay works through the implications of the reduction of identity to biology. Readers are left to wonder what type of criminal it is that the police so desperately need to catch. In a post-9/11 world, it is tempting to theorize that the West’s desire to monitor, catch, and prosecute “terrorists” is the driving motivation. However, while the threat of terrorism may have provided convenient ideological cover in the last decade, the trend of biometric policing had already been set in place prior to 9/11. A

---

6 Agamben notes that the slave, denied the sociality required for a *persona*, was excluded from society proper.

7 Agamben, 49.

8 Agamben, 50.
more contemporaneous development was the financialization of every aspect of life, which is a major prong of the neoliberal project.

NEOLIBERALISM AND THE INDEBTED MAN

The bridge between Agamben’s two essays can be built through examining how Maurizio Lazzarato links the neoliberal politics of debt to Foucault’s concept of biopower. Debt has been an essential part of human society for all of history; Nietzsche even goes so far as to postulate that the debt relation is the foundation of culture as such.\(^9\) However, in its contemporary deployment, debt has become one of the the agents of history, enacting an entirely new form of subjectivity.

Debt directly entails life discipline and a way of life that requires “work on the self,” a permanent negotiation with oneself, a specific form of subjectivity: that of the indebted man. In other words, debt reconfigures biopolitical power by demanding a production of subjectivity specific to indebted man.\(^10\)

The state’s policing of the criminal, identified by Agamben in “Identity,” should be understood as part of the complex flows of power exerted by the state, financial capital, and industrial capital, all directed towards the indebted individual. Power, spread across a wide multitude of both ostensibly “public” and “private” institutions, is too diffuse to provide an oppositional foe. The line between credit institutions, home and car manufacturers, and the government has been increasingly blurred. Loans are passed back and forth between various creditors, guaranteed by state institutions, ensuring that debtors can never completely or finally identify the matrices of power that dominate


\(^10\) Lazzarato, 104.
them. However, debt serves to hold this multiplicity of forces together.\textsuperscript{11} Debt operates institutionally, personally/bodily, ideologically, and disciplinarily.

It is the disciplinary aspect that is most important in this paper because of the way that it links to the creation of a self. The state, in light of its own financial interests and at the behest of ostensibly independent financial institutions, works to deepen the self of all the members of society. “As Nietzsche says, the main purpose of debt lies in its construction of a subject and a conscience, a self that believes in its specific individuality and that stands as guarantor of its own actions.”\textsuperscript{12} Debts are targeted at the hyper-individualized self. People are completely abstracted from any community, isolated in their debt, which is owed to a global financial apparatus. The individual must be tracked and catalogued. Data mining systems are developed to monitor the financial transactions of each individual. The self under neoliberalism is nothing but the net balance of debts owed by a body, a biometrically determined bare life.

Reduction of the self provides the target for the internal workings of the mnemotechnics of debt.\textsuperscript{13} “The individualization carried out by institutions now involves ‘morality’ by mobilizing the ‘self,’ since the debtor’s future actions must be molded, his

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} Lazzarato, 107.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Lazzarato, 130.
\item \textsuperscript{13} In neoliberalism, the threat of external punishment is maintained, but reserved for extreme circumstances. Delinquent debtors, or those without the necessary social means of combating external power, are subjected to the revocation of property and the denial of access to basic human needs, such as food and health care. This is why neoliberalism is particularly destructive to historically marginalized communities which lack social power; they are particularly vulnerable to the external force of debt. Nevertheless, they are still subjected to the disciplinary force which is directed towards all. Minority groups find themselves doubly oppressed. Large debtors, such as banks or rich/powerful individuals, have the necessary means to perpetually defer debts or even work towards having their debts cancelled through bailouts or bankruptcy courts.
\end{itemize}
uncertain future established in advance.”14 Individuals carry the weight of guilt for their debts, which they find increasingly difficult to pay off. Instead of the freedom to pursue their own desires, they must seek out ways to maximize the exchange value of their productive forces. The “indebted man” must seek to exploit her creativity in the creation of a personal brand. She is only as valuable as her personal brand. Activities such as craft-making or keeping a diary, which would, in times past, have been purely for personal enjoyment or communal enrichment, must now be directed towards the realm of exchange. Branding has been important for institutions anywhere there are markets. However, under neoliberalism, every member of an institution is made personally responsible for marketing their institution’s brand.

In a myriad of ways, the ubiquity of debt controls the subjectivity of contemporary individuals. Everywhere one looks, the economy pushes the creation and extension of markets, fostering an environment where the flux of exchange value is the only valid means of evaluation. Agamben argued that the reduction of identity to biological data means that we now have an identity that is not constructed by the person. “The reduction of man to a naked life is today such a fait accompli that it is by now the basis of the identity that the state recognizes its citizens.”15 However, the argument should be taken further: the way that debt is addressed to biological identity means that we now have identity without agency. A person who is shackled by debts has no choice but pursue economic value at all costs. Rest from economic forces is precluded. Enjoyment and communal enrichment as means of evaluation cannot be afforded. “Becoming

14 Lazzarato, 132.
15 Agamben, 52.
‘human capital’ and being an entrepreneur of the self are the new standards of employability.” In the last analysis, neoliberalism’s goal is to turn people into machines.

THE GLORIOUS BODY

In the light of this contemporary situation that offers no outside of the economic forces, Agamben turns to the dust bins of ancient and medieval Christian theology and explores the glorious body—the resurrected body in Paradise. All reflection on this doctrine came to an end through hierarchical fiat. However, without dogmatic concerns, Agamben takes up this “frozen theological theme” in a time when economic forces have frozen our bodies through the machine of debt. Analogous to the problem that bodies have become, the glorious body provides a problem for thought:

That of the ethical and political status of corporeal life (the bodies of the resurrected are numerically and materially the same as the ones they had during their earthly existence). This means that the glorious body will serve as a paradigm that will allow us to meditate on the figures, and the possible uses, of the human body as such.

An alternative to the multi-pronged attack on the body of neoliberalism must address at least two interrelated fronts: the isolation, individualization, and reduction of the self and the disciplinary apparatus that pushes all uses of the body towards the proliferation and expansion of exchange value. Agamben’s touching of the dead problems of the glorious body give material for thinking through contemporary problems of life.

---

16 Lazzarato, 145.

17 Agamben, 91.
Harkening back to the other essay discussed in this paper, the first problem that Agamben approaches is the identity of the resurrected body. The same problem of the nearness/distance of the persona to the physical body of the person is present. How can a soul and body, once separated by death, reintegrate? Can an identity be maintained through the death of the body? What is the age is the resurrected body, given that bodies die both young and old? The answer, which comes from Thomas Aquinas, is that “Paradise is a world for those in their thirties, invariably balanced between growth and decay.”18 However, it is the material identity of the earthly body and the resurrected body that is more problematic.

The dust and atoms that make up a body are always being recycled, discharged, and re-used by other bodies. Material flesh (often treated in the abstract as intact and hermetically) shows itself to be intertwined in numerous ways. What happens to Adam’s rib that formed Eve? What about semen? Whose body is whose? Earthly, bodily, fleshly existence is messy, interrelated, and shared. Aquinas resolves these problems by trying to parse out—embryos, semen, and more—what flesh belongs where, with the divine supplying any missing bits. Origen’s alternative solution is Platonic in form. “That which remains constant in each individual, he suggests, is the image (eidos) that we continue to recognize every time we encounter the individual, despite inevitable changes.”19 What is it about a person that makes them recognizable over time, even though their appearance and the flesh that makes them up radically changes over time? If we can recognize a person that we have not seen in years, we will likewise accredit the identity

18 Agamben, 92.
19 Agamben, 93.
of the resurrected person. Again, Agamben links this back to the problems of neoliberalism: “The paradigm of paradisiacal identity is not material sameness, which police departments around the world try to set today through biometric apparatuses, but rather the image, that is to say, the body’s likeness to itself.”\textsuperscript{20} The body of the “indebted man” is impressed upon by her debts in a (failed) attempt to transcend her body. Resurrected bodies are similar to their earthly selves, but not reducible to themselves.

Four characteristics of glory are important for distinguishing resurrected bodies from one another: impassibility, subtlety, agility, and clarity. The impassibility of the blessed body means that it will not be susceptible to the loss of glory and perfection. Sensory effects emanate from the glorious body and the body maintains its sensory abilities. As to subtlety, glorious bodies are palpable, and yet, through their supernatural virtue, can choose to be impalpable to nonglorious bodies. Agility pertains to the glorious body’s “effortless and uninhibited” movement. “Like dancers, who move in space with neither aim nor necessity, the blessed move in the heavens only in order to exhibit their agility.”\textsuperscript{21} Clarity has two senses: the shimmering of density and the splendor of transparency. All of these characteristics demonstrate the glorious body’s similarity to the earthly body and yet also point towards the crucial problem of the essay: the physiology of the glorious body.

It is through exploring physiology that the problem of the body’s use gives to thought an alternative to discipline of absolute submission to exchange value. First, the hair, nails, and bodily fluids of the blessed in Paradise open the discussion. These

\textsuperscript{20} Agamben, 94.

\textsuperscript{21} Agamben, 95-96.
instruments of the earthly body which contribute to the body’s perfection fall into the category of either necessary to the functioning of the body, or preservative of the necessary organs. Hair and nails make the cut, but will always remain at their perfect length, no longer, Agamben assumes, needing to be cut.\textsuperscript{22}

With procreation and nutrition, the aporia of the blessed body’s use reaches its most extreme. “If the organs that execute these functions–testicles, penis, vagina, womb, stomach, intestines–will necessarily be present in the resurrection, then what function are they supposed to have?”\textsuperscript{23} The function of procreation, and the body’s corresponding genitals, is no longer needed in Paradise: the human race has stopped reproducing. Likewise, the function of nutrition, with its requisite organs, is unnecessary, since the body no longer needs sustenance. However, theologians could not completely dispense with these organs as superfluous to the glorious body, given their presence in Edenic paradise prior to sin. In order to deal with this aporia, Aquinas separated the purposeful operation of the organs from their use. There is a virtue in an organ’s “suspended operation.”

Just as in advertisements or pornography, where the simulacra of merchandise or bodies exalt their appeal precisely to the extent that they cannot be used, but only exhibited, so in the resurrection the idle sexual organs will display the potentiality, or the virtue, of procreation. The glorious body is an ostensive body whose functions are not executed but rather displayed. Glory, in this sense, is in solidarity with inoperativity.\textsuperscript{24}

In inoperativity, use is united with worship to show forth glory. The glorious body acts, but its acts do not produce exchange value. Agamben clarifies what this means: “At

\textsuperscript{22} Agamben, 97.

\textsuperscript{23} Agamben, 98.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
stake here is the rendering inoperative of any activity directed toward an end, in order to then dispose it toward a new use, one that does not abolish the old use but persists in it and exhibits it.”25 Where neoliberalism produces bodies that are machines, resurrection produces bodies that are finally, for the first time, truly human.

CONCLUSION

It would be too simple to argue that the glorious body and the body under neoliberalism are exact opposites. The current economic system leaves ample room for critique, for zones of release from its oppressive force. However, it appears that history may be reaching a new threshold of violence, even going so far as to disregard the very reproduction of the life of labor. While this is not a wholly new development in history, this disciplinary regime is particularly nefarious because it is a mnemotechnics that extracts value from the body in ways that previous deployments of power did not touch. Searching for an alternative subjectivity within the system will always feed back into the system’s reproduction.

In a sense, Agamben shows there is no neoliberal subject. There is only a biometrically reduced (non)person who submits the totality of their force to the production of exchange value for no other reason than the tautological: to produce more exchange value. The glorious body allows us to think beyond the contemporary deadlock, to think of the communal body. Agamben captures this beautifully in another essay that explores religious feasts:

The feast day is not defined by what is not done in it but instead by the fact that what is done—which in itself is not unlike what is accomplished every day–

25 Agamben, 102.
becomes undone, rendered inoperative, liberated and suspended from its “economy,” from the reasons and aims that define it during the weekdays...If one eats, it is not done for the sake of being fed...if one walks, it is not done for the sake of going someplace.”

26

Feasts point, if only faintly and temporarily, towards an alternative to a system that can reintegrate all of life back into exchange value through its disciplinary machine. There is no disciplinary force of inoperativity, its only force is messianic hope, an absurdity, a resurrection of the body, a communism of free play. The glorious body is not some other body, but this body, with a small difference.

26 Agamben, 111.