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# Violence Lives in His Body: How Capitalist History Becomes an Employable Body

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# Abstract

This article follows a third-person "he" through autobiographical scenes displaced from the first person to develop an account of historical transmission as subjectivation. Capitalist, colonial, governmental, and familial histories do not act on an already constituted body from outside. They acquire ordinary interfaces in wages, care, school timetables, measurements of ability, linguistic markets, medical normality, and commodities, becoming posture, attention, shame, accent, self-monitoring, and the desire to be wanted. Bringing Marx, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, Barad, social reproduction theory, and scholarship on suzhi into contact, the article argues that historical violence persists through material-institutional relays that do not require historical memory. Its most durable achievement is reflex: a body that can reproduce inherited demands in the voices of care, reality, ability, and meaning.


# 1. A Body That Has Already Arrived Too Late

He cannot say when his body first went into debt. Birth was already too late. Before he was lifted, weighed, measured, and given a name on a piece of paper, land had already been enclosed, oceans cut into routes, cotton and sugar made cheap through millions of bodies, factory clocks had taken daylight from the sky, schools had learned to sort children of the same age into the same room, hospitals had accumulated curves of the normal and abnormal, states had learned to count populations, and firms would later learn to call a person's future earnings human capital. He arrived too late. Everything already had an interface. The mouth for taking in nutrition and saying the right things; the back for sitting straight; the eyes for sustained attention; the hands for writing; youth for accumulation; time for realization. Before he could say "I," his flesh was already halfway through a sentence several centuries long.

There is nothing memorable about the morning. A strip of white light at the edge of the curtain. The phone vibrates beside the bed. He reaches out to silence it and lies there for a few seconds more. Water boils in the kitchen. His mother calls his name through the door. She is not angry. She only says, hurry up. Clothes hang over the back of a chair; one sock is on the floor. When he sits up his back is curved and one side of his hair has been flattened in sleep. No factory, no colonial officer, no economics book lies open beside the bed. Only someone who has to get up. This is ordinary.

If history always appeared carrying whips, guns, decrees, and corpses, it would be easier to know where it was. More often, spectacular violence leaves arrangements that later people can use without speaking of history at all. Property, wages, qualifications, prices, schedules, and standards can continue relations whose origins no one present needs to remember. Violence here does not name every act of correction or every process of subject formation. It refers first to historically coercive relations - dispossession, coerced labour, colonial domination, and the unequal arrangements they establish - whose effects can be relayed through later practices that may themselves be ordinary, caring, or nonviolent. A mother's reminder or a school grade is therefore not equivalent to enclosure or colonial rule. The problem is how such local acts can become interfaces through which inherited dependencies and valuations continue to

work. The body here is not a surface on which history later leaves scars; the question is how institutions, objects, intimate relations, and materials participate in making a person who can say "I," blame himself, and hope to be employed.

The third-person "he" is not an anonymized respondent. It is an autobiographical device displaced from the first person, adjacent to autotheory but refusing a stable confessional subject at the beginning (Fournier, 2021). The scenes and dialogue are retrospective autobiographical reconstructions, not interview transcripts or claims to verbatim recall; where remembered speech occurred in Chinese, the English is the author's translation. Nor does "he" stand for Chinese students as a population or for a universal male subject. Familiar family voices, bodily reflexes, and forms of shame are moved half a step away so that they do not automatically belong to a private interiority. If a complete self is assumed first, capitalism, coloniality, school, medicine, and family can only act upon it afterward. Here the "I" is one of the effects that requires explanation.

Marx gives the first hard line: labour-power becomes a commodity through historical processes that separate producers from independent conditions of subsistence (Marx, 1976). Feminist revisions show that producing labour-power also reorganizes reproduction, care, gender, and bodies within households (Federici, 2004; Bhattacharya, 2017). Foucault shifts the problem into bodily techniques: timetables, training, examination, and normalization help produce useful capacities rather than merely constrain workers who already exist (Foucault, 1995). Butler makes the paradox of subjection explicit: power is not only external domination but part of the formation of the reflexive subject who can turn demands upon itself (Butler, 1997). Barad's materialism makes the body less passive still: matter participates in materialization rather than waiting for discourse (Barad, 2007). Deleuze and Guattari supply a language of machinic connection and territorialization in which heterogeneous components compose an apparatus without a central author (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

Historical transmission, as used here, is neither the diffusion of ideas nor a single genealogy running from enclosure to a present feeling. It does not claim that every bodily reflex can be traced to one originating event. Bourdieu's habitus is a crucial neighbour: history persists as embodied schemes without needing to be remembered as history (Bourdieu, 1990). Elias likewise follows long transformations of interdependence into self-restraint, shame, and bodily habit (Elias, 2000). Transmission places analytical weight on the relay itself: the heterogeneous interfaces through which relations change form - property into wage dependence, wage dependence into household anxiety, educational demand into grades and timetables, and these into attention and shame. Colonial and class histories enter the tongue through linguistic markets; statistical norms enter the mirror; commodity chains enter calories and wakefulness. The concept therefore does not rename disposition. It asks how historically heterogeneous relations acquire compatible interfaces in the present, each translation changing the previous relation and gaining a new local reason.

## 2. The Child Has No Job Yet, but the Employer Is Already There

Don't slouch. His mother's hand presses between his shoulder blades. Straighter. You look listless like that. People will laugh at you. He lifts his chest with the pressure of her hand; a few minutes later it collapses again and she pushes once more. If he stays under the covers in the morning, the blanket is pulled away. Get up. Hurry up.

The sun is already high. If he eats slowly, he is told to hurry. If he drifts while doing homework, fingers tap the desk. If he plays too long, he hears that he has done nothing all day. Nothing did not mean that nothing had happened. He might have lain on the floor watching ants come through a crack in the bricks, taken a toy apart and put it together again, stared out a window, told himself a story with no use.

None of this counted. A day had to leave something visible: pages of writing, solved problems, a score, measurable improvement. If it left nothing, the day seemed wasted. The body first learned to fear that blankness. At the door his mother fixes his collar and gives his back a quick pat. It barely counts as a reprimand. The elevator has not arrived; both look at their phones in the mirrored wall. The pat is enough. He holds his shoulders until he leaves the building, then lets them loosen. Much training looks like this: a sentence returns across years, the same gesture is repeated, and the child learns where to put his body before a certain expression appears.

His mother likes diligence. Teachers do too. He rarely receives that kind of praise. Almost all the praise he gets comes down to one sentence: this child is very smart. The sentence never ends there. There is always a but. But he never applies himself. But he is too lazy. But he cannot stick with anything. But he is wasting his intelligence.

Intelligence therefore does not feel like a gift. It feels like principal already entered under his name. Once other people have acknowledged that it exists, he owes them its conversion into grades, rankings, certificates, later into things that can be entered on forms. If the conversion does not happen, the problem is not that his capacity found no use. He has squandered something that was his.

"It's not that you can't do it. You're just lazy." The sentence closes off other possibilities at once. Lying over the desk is no longer only tiredness; it is laziness. Looking out the window is no longer only distraction; it is wasting intelligence. Failing to finish a book is not that the body is exhausted, not that the material is meaningless, but that the will is weak.

A child cannot yet explain the difference between fatigue and refusal, and the people around him have already named it. Lazy. Once the word falls, explanation ends. His mother no longer needs to know why he does not want to continue. Neither does the teacher. If he is smart, then failure can only be a moral failure of his own. Praise and blame become braided together. After long enough, "you're very smart" begins to sound like a threat: you have something to waste, so you are not allowed to stop.

Other people's children always exist. They are always a little faster, a little earlier, able to endure a little more. When he is tired, they are not; when he wants to stop, they are still working; when he gets ninety, someone else gets ninety-eight. Comparison does not need to explain competition.

It produces a dropping sensation in the stomach, makes the shoulders shrink when grades are asked about, snaps the eyes back to the page when a door handle turns. "Smart" proves that he could have caught up; "lazy" explains why he did not. Together the two words erase the school, the curriculum, the pace, bodily difference, and every discomfort from the picture, leaving only a child who has failed to manage himself correctly.

After parent-teacher meetings, his mother repeats the teacher's diagnosis: your brain is fine; you simply do not put your mind to it; if you worked, your grades would be different. She can sound as though she is delivering good news - at least you are not stupid. The problem has been made fixable: sit longer, memorize more, endure more. At dinner, "smart" and "lazy" sit beside reheated food, tomorrow's weather, another child's university, what has become more expensive. They need no special tone of voice. That is how they stay.

In reform-era China this judgment belongs to a history that cannot be flattened into the single word neoliberalism. Anagnost (2004) shows how suzhi, or "quality," links population improvement, bodily value, and market transition; Kipnis (2006, 2011) traces it across education, civility, class, income, and government, while Fong (2004) documents concentrated familial aspiration under particular urban one-child conditions. Related work follows exemplary citizenship, professional aspiration, mobility, and individualized risk (Bakken, 2000; Hoffman, 2010; Sun, 2009; Yan, 2009). Recent research sharpens the problem. Hornborg (2026) describes personal development as both opportunity and obligation in parent-child narratives, while Wu (2025) shows employability discourse in contemporary China producing self-responsibilised subjects through intertwined neoliberal and neo-socialist rationalities. These studies do not diagnose one household; they show why "make something of yourself" and "who will want you later?" have an institutional audience.

The word "want" attaches itself to him before any employer exists. School selects first, university selects again, the company selects later. Being kept feels like recognition; being unwanted feels as if the body itself has malfunctioned. Research on employability has criticized precisely this compression of employment into individual skills and attributes, which can obscure labour demand, geography, class, care obligations, and institutional barriers (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005). Family language can perform the same compression without policy vocabulary. If a company does not want you, your ability is insufficient. If a teacher dislikes your performance, you did not try hard enough. The structural problem becomes a moral question small enough to act on today: are you worth choosing?

The nonexistent employer can occupy his evenings because the household lives in the shadow of wages. Rent, tuition, medical care, old age, and respectability make employability practical before it becomes ideological. His mother does not say enclosure at dinner. She says everyone needs a job. Someone has to want you. She puts food in his bowl and, during the same meal, asks what company would want someone this lazy. Food grows the body; words send it out. Care and the production of labour-power are not separate events. The hand that keeps him alive can also arrange that life into a form expected to survive by being selected.

What the child practices is not labour itself but becoming someone who does not want to disappoint the chooser. These commands are not echoes of history - echo is too light, as though the event were over. Historical violence does not travel by itself into a child's shoulders. It requires property, wages, schools, families, examinations, and languages of reality that translate dependence into locally reasonable demands. At every layer it loses some blood and gains some ordinariness.

Calling this a machine does not mean a steel monster swallowing an intact child. The machine begins with connections. The desk finds the spine; the alarm finds sleep; grades find shame; praise finds desire; comparison finds fear; a mother's hand finds the shoulders; "smart" finds the future; "lazy" finds every pause. His mother does not know what a recruiter thinks, and a recruiter does not know how she presses a child's shoulders. The connection still works. Territorialization names these heterogeneous relations repeatedly finding places on the body where they can hold, until what has been fixed there is mistaken for character (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

## 3. Bells, Scores, and "Smart but Lazy"

There is no visible machine at school either. People talk before the bell. It rings; chairs scrape; the room quiets. No one announces, "we are training your sense of time." At break he laughs and leans against the wall; as the next class approaches, his body returns to its seat. Institutions need not occupy all of life. They can leave gaps as long as they decide when the gap ends.

School is neither a simple copy of the factory nor a world separate from labour. Thompson (1967) describes the remaking of task-oriented life through clocks, lateness, wage deductions, and the working day; Foucault (1995) shows how timetables work with spatial distribution, repetitive exercise, and examination. The school bell is not a factory whistle, but it trains a portable capacity: stop one activity when an external signal arrives, hand the body quickly to another, and experience switchability as normal. Discipline need not mean continuous obedience. An ordinary achievement is a person who can be free for a few minutes and then return without being told. The relation between schooling and labour discipline has been theorized without requiring a simple school-factory identity (Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Willis, 1977; Braverman, 1974; Burawoy, 1979).

Hurry up. Stop dawdling. Do one more page. How did you waste the whole day again? No nineteenth-century stopwatch lies on his desk; it no longer needs to. When the blanket is pulled away, when fingers tap the desk, when the door handle turns and his eyes jump back to the book, time-discipline has already acquired muscle. Later he checks his own screen-time, times his own reading, wakes from an afternoon nap with a nearly physical sense of loss. The clock does not mysteriously enter the chest from the wall. It passes through school timetables, parental urging, cycles of grades, repeated training, and becomes the rhythm of the chest itself.

His relation to time is not continuous anxiety. It is small and portable. He checks the time before a shower and after; before an episode he calculates when it will end; after an afternoon nap his first

movement is toward the phone. If the number is later than expected, the body becomes a little heavy. He can still waste an afternoon, but the word "waste" is already waiting nearby.

A third route passes through measurement. Factory management measured motion, armies physical capacity, insurers risk, states populations, schools intelligence, attainment and development, hospitals height, weight, eyesight, blood pressure. Measurement does not only discover what a body is; it also produces a place the body is expected to approach. His mother does not need to have read Taylor or know the history of intelligence testing. She only has to say: this child is smart, just too lazy. Those two sentences compress an entire politics of measurement into a domestic judgment. Scientific management makes this history unusually explicit by treating bodily motion and time as objects of calculation (Taylor, 1911).

"Smart" marks a capacity presumed already to exist; "lazy" explains why that capacity did not become a score. Failure no longer requires questions about curriculum, pace, fatigue, interest, or institution. Once ability has been affirmed, the gap is assigned to will. Abstract comparison lands in the stomach when someone asks about grades; in the shoulders when a door opens; in the eyes when wandering attention is nailed back to paper. Talent does not remain a concept in the head. Repeated evaluation grows it into a sense of debt.

When exam papers are handed back, he sometimes covers the score first. Not every time, and not because he is necessarily afraid of anyone. His hand simply presses down on the corner of the page. Someone beside him asks what he got. He says a number. The other person may only say oh. A great deal of shame has no audience; it can complete itself when nobody else cares. Measurement enters the body not only because numbers carry authority, but because numbers travel. A grade comes home. A ranking enters a conversation. A weight remains in a phone record. They continue working after they leave the institution that produced them.

"Smart" and "lazy" are not purely domestic words. Psychology, school testing, and vocational guidance made ability, character, potential, and adaptability into describable and governable objects. Rose (1999) calls this a government of the "soul": interior qualities become sites of expertise and self-government. A teacher says "smart" and the household receives a diagnosis of ability; "doesn't apply himself" becomes a diagnosis of will. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) show how schooling can translate particular competencies into apparently universal academic value and return the result as talent. "Smart but lazy" is especially efficient because it preserves potential while individualizing failure: the road was open; you failed to use yourself properly. Work on grades, audits, and educational government shows how quantification travels as merit, accountability, and self-evaluation (Kipnis, 2008; Rohde, 2023; Shore and Wright, 2015; Davies and Bansel, 2007).

Human capital provides an explicit vocabulary for this portability. Education, training, health, and mobility become investments expected to produce future returns (Becker, 1993). Foucault (2008) reads American neoliberalism as making the worker an entrepreneur of his own capital; Brown (2015) follows competitiveness and investment across domains not previously organized primarily by economic value.

Yet transmission does not require a household to read Becker or Foucault. Youth can appear as an investment phase, intelligence as principal, languages as skills, certificates as assets, and failure as something to convert into growth. Governmentality accounts emphasize responsibilization, indebtedness, and self-management (Rose and Miller, 1992; Ong, 2006; Read, 2009; Lazzarato, 2012; Sennett, 1998). Chowdhury (2022) similarly shows neoliberal subjectification working affectively through self-othering, as bodily qualities and voices that fail an idealized self are devalued.

"Don't waste yourself" cuts deeper than "go to work" because it turns the self into a depreciating asset before employment begins. "Lazy" becomes a fast explanation joining time, measurement, and self-investment. "I'm too lazy" takes less work than saying: my body is colliding with a curriculum, sleep, comparison, family anxiety, and a labour market. The speed is politically useful. Complex causation is shortened into a personal defect that can be repaired immediately.

## 4. Tongue, Spine, and the Normal Body

Another route enters the tongue, skin, and posture. Colonial rule did not only seize land and labour; it built schools, administrative languages, hygienic regimes, and knowledges of civilized bodies. Some accents were heard as coarse, some bodies as lazy or immature, and some languages were drawn closer to law, education, and power. The lowering of imperial flags does not equalize linguistic exchange value. The household says: learn English well, make your pronunciation standard, speak confidently. Empire once sorted governable voices through school and administration; global labour markets recode linguistic difference as competitiveness; parents recode competitiveness as "useful for your future"; the tongue repeatedly searches the mouth for a more correct position. Recent analysis of China's post-1978 English-language education policies shows a related hybrid formation: English is instrumentalized for market competitiveness while personal development is articulated with nationalist and collective goals (Lu and Dasli, 2026). Colonial history enters the body not because he remembers colonialism, but because voices continue to carry unequal institutional value.

The line through language needs care. To equate a Chinese student practicing English directly with a colonial school would erase specific historical differences and turn "coloniality" into a universal metaphor. The sharper question is why languages, accents, and ways of speaking have such unequal exchange value in global education and labour markets. Bourdieu's (1991) linguistic market reminds us that a "correct language" is always produced in an institutional field by those authorized to recognize it. Coloniality and sociolinguistic work place such exchange values within longer histories of race, administration, mobility, and authorized speech (Stoler, 1995; McClintock, 1995; Quijano, 2000; Blommaert, 2010).

Pronunciation can be learned for pleasure. But when "native-like," "standard," and "fluent" are simultaneously connected to admission, visas, careers, and class respectability, the tongue is already moving inside unequal relations of value. When Fanon (2008) writes about colonial language, he ties pronunciation and grammar to recognition as a full person: speaking the colonizer's language is not

merely mastering a code; it is moving toward a mode of being already defined as superior. Ngũgĩ (1986) emphasizes how colonial education organizes memory, imagination, and cultural authority through language.

These scenes are not the same as contemporary English learning, but they make "language is only a tool" harder to sustain. Empire need not survive in its original administrative form for linguistic hierarchies to acquire new institutional lives in markets, publishing, universities, and immigration regimes.

Sometimes pronunciation practice is only a word repeated into a phone. Play. Pause. Repeat. The tongue touches the teeth; the lips narrow. One sound is wrong, so he tries again late at night with no foreigner present. His mother only needs to ask how his English is going, a teacher to say a sound is not standard, a job posting to say fluent. The hierarchy travels through people and objects that do not know one another.

Clean, straight, healthy enter by a similar route. Modern medicine, public health, eugenics, and statistics made bodies comparable and improvable, organized around averages, risks, capacities, and deviations. Hacking (1990) traces how statistical styles of reasoning make populations governable; Davis (1995) shows that the modern normal body has a history; Canguilhem (1991) warns against collapsing the living organism's normativity into statistical conformity. A mother's hand straightening a spine is not a eugenic policy, but the direction - this body should be brought closer to a standard - can circulate through medicine, school, advertising, recruitment, and family. Disability and crip scholarship further shows how capacity, debility, and bodily difference are politically organized rather than neutral deviations from a universal body (Garland-Thomson, 1997; Kafer, 2013; Puar, 2017).

The health check is quieter. Shoes off. Step on. Height, weight, eyesight recorded. A doctor glances at the screen and says, pay attention to this. Nobody supervises him afterward. He remembers the number in the mirror or calculates whether he has eaten too much. Once the standard settles in, the examination can be brief. His mother cannot stand behind him forever; mirrors, photographs, an aching neck, and a comment about slouching take turns restoring the hand.

Don't slouch therefore has several meanings at once, none reducible to the others. It can be a mother's concern for health, a demand for respectable appearance, a response to the posture produced by long hours at a school desk, and part of a broader modern body politics in which bodies should be correctable, improvable, visibly energetic. The point is not to prove that the mother's hand "is" the state, medicine, or capital. It is to follow how these institutions provide a direction that the hand can understand. She pushes once; the mirror pushes next; when the mirror is gone, the photograph pushes; eventually the shoulders push themselves.

## 5. History Eaten, Care, and the Employable Body

History also enters as matter: eaten, worn, held. Sugar, cotton, coffee, rubber, and minerals were made cheap through plantations, slavery, indenture, colonial seizure, and global trade. Contemporary supply chains are not old plantations preserved intact, but they continue to move extraction, low wages, pollution, and dangerous labour away from many sites of consumption. By the time the commodity reaches him, coercion can have been processed into price, wounds into softness and sweetness.

He will not taste the plantation in sugar, feel slavery in a cotton shirt, or see the mine in a battery. Yet the body eats, wears, and holds these things. Mintz (1985) links ordinary sweetness to plantation slavery, industrial labour rhythms, and mass consumption; Beckert (2014) follows cotton through slavery, colonial violence, finance, and industrialization. No present cup can be traced crudely to one past plantation. What persists is a capacity to place conditions of production at a distance so that use and price confront the consumer first, within wider histories of slavery, imperial accumulation, and relocated coercive labour (Blackburn, 1997; Harvey, 2003; Pun, 2005; Pun and Smith, 2007; Mezzadri, 2017).

Marx's (1976) account of commodity fetishism is not simply the claim that "people do not know the truth." A commodity can be used perfectly well without the user continually knowing its social relations. Coffee must wake him, a phone must communicate, clothes must keep him warm. The more smoothly the function works, the more history can retreat into the background. Comfort is therefore not only a false veil covering violence. It is a technical condition of transmission: extraction, low wages, and pollution elsewhere must first become sufficiently stable things before they can serve nearby as infrastructures of study and work.

The convenience store is brightly lit. He takes bottled coffee and bread. Checkout is fast; the scanner chirps. He does not stop at every purchase to reconstruct a supply chain. Things must first work as things: coffee for wakefulness, clothes for warmth, phones for contact and wasted time. Violence can arrive as commodity because provenance has become quiet enough. Labels list origin and materials, not an entire labour relation. He wears the shirt because it can be worn. History is compressed behind function.

This does not create an ethical duty of pure consumption. An individual cannot undo global production by maintaining continuous moral attention to every object. Guilt can itself become self-improvement - buy more correctly, know more, become a more conscious consumer - while relations of production remain. The point is not that commodities contain a hidden moral lesson. Historical relations can become materially effective without becoming present to consciousness.

The claim that centuries of history have been poured into his flesh is no longer only poetic. Calories, cloth, caffeine after too little sleep, and the battery sustaining attention move through transregional material flows. Here Barad's materialism returns: these materials are not a passive background to subjectivity but participate in materializing the body able to stay awake, study, and work (Barad, 2007). The body is not a museum of history; it metabolizes relations without thereby making them intelligible, converting them into capacity for tomorrow without knowing where they came from.

Gender and family are not layers added after the labouring subject is made. Wage labour depends on bodies being born, fed, cleaned, taught, comforted, and restored. Social reproduction theory makes class formation begin long before a worker enters a workplace (Bhattacharya, 2017). Fraser (2016) describes a contradiction in which accumulation depends on capacities for care while repeatedly devaluing and exhausting them. His mother stands inside this contradiction. She can be worn down by work and still treat being needed by an employer as proof of adult value. Feminist work on organizations and emotional labour similarly makes visible the gendered infrastructures through which employable subjects are maintained (Hochschild, 1983; Acker, 2006).

She does not oppose employment. She can treat being needed as proof of love and value. At the same time, she bears much of the work of making the next body healthy enough, disciplined enough, able to endure enough. She says she is not hungry and puts meat in his bowl, then says all the hardship we've endured cannot be for nothing. The child eats more than meat. He eats a debt of repayment. The household is not a warm place outside capital that capital occasionally invades. Here, warmth itself carries things across: love brings nutrition into the body and debt with it.

When his mother puts meat in his bowl, she may only say: eat, have some more. After dinner she clears the table and he returns to his room. Care does not become false because it carries a direction; that is precisely why the direction is hard to separate from it. Eat enough so you can study. Go to bed early so you are not late tomorrow. Don't make me worry. Make something of yourself later. The body receives care and direction at once.

She cannot be reduced to the morally pure "sacrificing mother." She gets tired, curses her boss, and knows when work is humiliating; she can also maintain the grammar of employment. Why would a boss keep an idler? Other people can endure hardship; why can't you? No one is going to indulge you. Being dominated does not automatically produce a critique of domination. A person can hate a particular boss while preserving "being wanted by a boss" as a measure of adult worth.

When parents tell a child not to blame society, the sentence often works less like doctrine than a survival instruction: society is too large to change; school rules are fixed; companies have standards; the thing you can move today is yourself. Homework unfinished, finish it. Interview approaching, prepare. Because action at the scale of the self can solve the immediate problem, the structure that produced it can disappear from view.

This is how the machine enters him. It is not a machine outside swallowing an intact child, but institutions left by different histories connecting section by section: property connects subsistence to wages, wages connect the household to employment, school connects childhood to timetables, measurement connects capacity to ranking, colonial language hierarchies connect the tongue to opportunity, medicine and statistics connect flesh to normal values, commodity chains connect distant lands and bodies to his consumption.

In the end his mother's hand needs to push his shoulder once, a teacher needs to write one score, a phone needs to show how many hours he has used today. The machine needs no unified command because the connections themselves can produce commands. Territorialization is not an abstract word. It is these heterogeneous historical relations finding places on his body where they can hold, then making what has been fixed there look like character: his laziness, his intelligence, his lack of spirit, his self-control, his ambition, his future.

The machine has no gear noise in ordinary life. It may be a deadline, a family-group message about somebody else's child, a health reminder, a timetable, or a sentence saying make good use of your time. Each has its own local reason; together they stabilize a shape of life. He is late, procrastinates, sleeps through alarms, leaves tasks to the last day. Violation is not automatically outside: procrastination still orbits deadlines, and rest can be organized for the next round of work.

## 6. Why Pain Has to Mean Something

Meaning is not an elegy written after violence has ended. It can be one of the devices through which violence continues. If his mother's exhaustion is called sacrifice, he has to make something of himself or her exhaustion will look wasted. If humiliation at school is called "for your own good," he must grow grades or maturity out of humiliation. If work wears a person down and work is called "realizing your value," depletion can be re-entered as maturity. Violence does not need to deny that pain happened. It can announce in advance that the pain will eventually be useful.

Berlant's cruel optimism names attachments to objects that promise a good life while obstructing flourishing (Berlant, 2011). Ahmed (2010) shows how happiness can operate as a directional sign, orienting bodies toward approved objects and life courses. "You'll understand when you're older" is a domestic technology of futurity: pain that cannot be defended now is pardoned by a future that has not arrived. The promise is not necessarily cynical. It can be sincere, which makes it more durable. Critical work on happiness, resilience, and therapeutic self-management shows how well-being itself can become an injunction to adapt and remain productive (Binkley, 2014; Davies, 2015; Cabanas and Illouz, 2019; Joseph, 2013; Neocleous, 2013; Povinelli, 2011).

This is why "don't blame society" and "life has to have meaning" connect so easily. The first shortens causation and returns the actionable problem to the individual; the second looks for a return on what has been endured. Time should become capacity, failure experience, trauma growth, parental exhaustion the child's future. Even an afternoon that produces nothing becomes troubling because it refuses to supply material that can later be narrated as investment.

Perhaps the machine dislikes not pain but pain that cannot be retrospectively credited. Some humiliations did not make him mature; some arguments only ruined a day; some exhausted years may remain loss. Ready-made sentences repair this possibility: hardship is good for you; at least you learned something; one day you will thank me. Meaning becomes complete after the event when pain can be narrated as necessary discipline and a terrible period preserved by finding a return.

Meaning can therefore turn the past into debt. If a parent admits that decades of endurance were simply loss, the loss may never return anything. If it becomes sacrifice, the child's success can settle the account. He is required not only to build his own future but to prove something retroactively about the previous generation: the overtime, anxiety, family conflict, and compromise were not wasted. Success becomes an accounting technology. If the final result is good enough, what happened before can be renamed necessary cost.

He increasingly hates the phrase "become a better version of yourself." It sounds ownerless, almost emancipatory. Yet it compresses demands formed across many institutions into one pronoun: you. You improve. You take responsibility. You realize your talent. You convert trauma. You turn sacrifice into outcome. External power has not disappeared when these tasks are performed upon the self; one of its achievements is a person able to continue them without supervision.

Shopping malls, schools, and platforms circulate similar phrases: become a better version of yourself; don't waste your youth; turn your passion into a career. Some sound gentle, some rebellious. Even "be yourself" is quickly followed by a clearer, braver, more successful self. Effective language need not be believed constantly. It only has to remain available when failure needs an explanation or the self needs urging onward.

Meaning and human capital meet at a dark point: both dislike loss that remains loss. Time must become capacity; pain growth; failure experience. The most complete form of waste is not zero income but a past that cannot be redescribed as investment. This is also why healing does not guarantee an outside. Burnout can be managed as a project of restoring productivity, critique turned into a career, resistance into a brand, trauma into a mature self-narrative. The machine does not have to eliminate everything foreign to it. It can wait until the foreign thing becomes useful.

## Conclusion: History Does Not Require Memory; It Requires Reflex

Transmission is not an arrow from "capitalism" to "anxiety" but a relay in constant modification. Dispossession reorganizes subsistence; wage dependence enters household planning; educational desire passes through measurement and timetables into childhood; colonial and class histories enter the tongue through linguistic markets; statistical norms enter the mirror; commodity chains enter calories and convenience. Centuries of violence therefore have routes rather than a single memory. Each translation changes the previous layer, generates local reasons, and makes the demand more ordinary: dependence becomes a family fixation on being wanted; that fixation becomes diligence; diligence falls repeatedly on sleep, posture, attention, and self-monitoring.

Not knowing can be useful to the transmission. If he feels shame at "lazy," debt at "smart," panic when a day produces nothing, and the need to prove himself when employment is mentioned, history has what it needs. It does not require memory. It requires reflex. It does not require ideological agreement. It requires the body to tighten, hurry, compare, correct, and continue before the causal chain can be reconstructed.

Darker than being shaped by old violence is the fact that violence can speak in the voices of love, reality, ability, and meaning. His mother does not experience herself as executing a history of property. A teacher does not think a score has anything to do with industrial time. A recruiter asking for "resilience under pressure" need not hear the history of normalized endurance. When he straightens his own back in a mirror, he does not feel anyone touching him. The machine does not need a centre because the local translations are enough.

Sunday night brings that feeling. The room is quiet. Nothing is happening on the desk. Tomorrow's things are already arranged; the alarm has been set and checked again. He may watch a video for a while, stop, wonder whether he has forgotten something. He has not. The body has already begun to tighten for the next day. There is no new command. The old ones are sufficient. They do not replay as complete sentences. What remains is direction: sleep early, don't be late, don't waste time, don't let people think you are incapable. The light goes out. The direction remains.

Violence lives in his body not because the body preserves wounds left by history. A wound at least allows the fantasy that beneath it there was once intact skin. There was not. History passes through land, wages, family, school, medicine, commodities, cities, language, becoming ordinary layer by layer; then it passes through his ordinary life into the next judgment, the next piece of advice, the next body. In the morning he may say to another child: you're obviously smart, you're just too lazy. At that moment centuries of violence no longer need to enter from outside. They have learned to be born from his mouth.

## Declarations

# Author Contribution

A.Z. conceived the article, developed the theoretical framework and analysis, and wrote and revised the manuscript. A.Z. approved the final version and is accountable for all aspects of the work.

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