

# it's a fief in the night to come and grab you

*"Reconstructing successive forms of consciousness is one thing.  
Proving the necessity of their succession is quite another."*

Hegel said that. Actually, no, Habermas said that about the moment in *Philosophy of History* when Hegel pink-slipped Kant's transcendental occupations in order to turn consciousness back upon itself. But, I mean, really: pretty sure Lil Wayne also said that to Birdman about Cash Money Records ("I am a prisoner and so is my creativity."), none too long after Jon Hamm—in guise of Don Draper—whispered it in the ear of a time-feral Coca-Cola executive ("It's the real thing!"). Here's a theory of performance: I think, therefore IBM.

The thing about feudalism is at least it had the decency to lay bare the notion that most people do not control their own destinies—if late capitalism is a pyramid scheme premised upon the structural exploitation of inequality, an intractable abstraction in which one trades one's labour-power for a wage, then feudalism was its alienated older sibling, twenty years sober after a serf's chicken failed to jump over a fence to prove its maturity for manor tax purposes. Both feudalism and capitalism are, if nothing else, historically specific forms of social life; coincidentally (or not), both Heath Ledger and Dennis Quaid portrayed knights in the movies, but only one of them confessed to blowing rails of snow on a daily basis in the 1980s to Meghan Kelly on *The Today Show*. "History is unfreedom, bitch."—Taylor Swift.

Hegel's most co-opted fable is the passage referred to as "Lordship and Bondage," from *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), or the master-slave dialectic, to tip our hat to the hegemonic bond between rhetoric and imperialism. I can pretty much guarantee you that Hegel never threw a perfect game on acid, nor did he anticipate the late twentieth-century gesture of renaming baseball stadiums after bank franchises sued by the Department of Justice for charging black and Hispanic borrowers higher rates for sub-prime mortgages, or multi-purpose pet superstores who settled with the state of California for \$1.5 million dollars plus impunity for overcharging their customers and improperly caring for animals, and/or a shitty beer company that broke a 1977 strike by firing and replacing 500 workers, prompting a ten-year-long boycott by national labor unions. But, hey, the Chicago Cubs moved a lot of gum.

One thing Hegel did see was the slow-burn transition from feudalism into mercantilism, or soft boy capitalism, which makes the primary contribution of the master-slave dialectic, in terms of social fantasies of economic life, the realization that the struggle between ownership and possession of the land deeply flavored interpersonal relations of domination.

Jacques Pictet, the founder of a French trade magazine, coined the term, "hypermarket," in 1968, the same year that Anthony Hopkins made his film debut *The Lion in Winter*—a fictional adaptation of the reign of Henry II, structured around a nascent take on primogeniture (spoiler alert: IRL the kingdom goes to eldest son Richard the Lionheart, who soon splits for the Crusades, then to his younger brother King John, the villain of Robin Hood lore). Other things that happened in 1968: cops killed three unarmed black student activists at South Carolina State College protesting the

white proprietor of a local bowling alley; cops killed Black Panther treasurer Bobby Hutton; cops killed 100 civilians at a student demonstration against the government at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in Mexico City. *¡No queremos olimpiadas, queremos revolución!* (“We don’t want Olympics, we want revolution!”) Service in the feudal levy, an analogue to modern-day policing, was restricted to land-owning minor nobility. In 2010, Target, a hypermarket if ever there were one, introduced a new model of corporate giving, “Target and Blue”—teaching government agencies criminal profiling by applying “state-of-the-art technology” from its 1,400 stores, each of which sells *Braveheart* on Blu-Ray for \$14.99

“Abolish all private property!” was not a feudalist anthem. After all, what Marx really did was historicize history. And yet: if the dialectic of abstract time and historical time at the heart of capital began with a single ringing bell, then all feudal Everyman wanted, beyond an allegorical journey to salvation in a medieval morality play, was to bang the gong.

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From a Groupon review of the Medieval Times franchise in Schaumburg, Illinois (once home to the largest manufacturer of slot machines in the United States):

“This was a really good time. The only thing was that our server was super busy. Our soup came, then much later our bread. It would have been great to have them together.”