RUPTURE

On the Emergence of the Political

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For Walter A. Davis,

our condition of possibility

CONTENTS

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Rupture

INTRODUCTION

The Theory of Rupture

Political philosophy, from Plato onward, has occupied itself with the distribution of power. Different political philosophers allocate power in various ways according to their respective ideas about the proper arrangement of society. Plato places the philosopher-kings in charge; Aristotle prizes an aristocratic government; Hobbes insists on the foundational power of the sovereign; Rousseau theorizes the general will as the site of political power; and so on. Even Marx's materialist break with the history of philosophy is not a break with the fundamental question of political philosophy. Unlike earlier political philosophers, Marx envisions an equitable distribution of power achieved through political revolution. Political philosophers today continue to speculate about how power might be distributed in order to promote either the maximum justice or the maximum stability. From John Rawls's notion of justice as fairness to Claude Lefort's idea of democracy as a regime where the position of power is empty to Martha Nussbaum's association of politics with human dignity, the goal of political theory is to conceive political logics and languages designed to vest power in its proper location. To conceive the proper distribution or investiture of power—in this or that individual, institution, or revolutionary idea—is to propose, in the end, a path for power to oversee the creation of a reasonable, just, and stable social order.

Our purpose here is to reconceive political philosophy by separating it from concerns about the distribution of power. This requires, in our view, orienting political thought around a different political idea—an idea that has the ability both to make sense of political events and to animate political acts. This idea is rupture. Rupture occurs at moments of revolutionary historical change, but it is not just revolution: it is also the interruption of the flow of social life whose force remains in the wake of revolutionary changes. The political impact of rupture does not disappear when its obvious manifestations cease to be prominently visible.

A rupture occurs when the coordinates that organize existence undergo a shift, such as when culture emerges out of the natural order. The emergence of culture out of nature is the fundamental and foundational rupture, but throughout history this same process happens through the introduction of a hitherto impossible idea whose emergence transforms the terrain of the possible. Instead of inhabiting a closed world with the earth at its center, for instance, we become part of an open universe that has no center at all.[1] Or instead of viewing hierarchical relations as stemming from the nature of things, we begin to conceive of an inherent equality among human beings. Or instead of viewing real numbers as the limit of mathematical inquiry, we calculate with imaginary ones. From the perspective prior to their onset, these events are impossible, and yet they transpire nonetheless. Rupture is the occurrence of the impossible, when the very ground under our feet shifts in order to transform the point from which we see.

When political philosophy focuses on the distribution of power, it remains within the realm of the possible. Change in power relations can occur, but it always does so from within a set of possibilities. Even taking up the political position of opposing oneself to power—the tack of someone like Michel Foucault—fails to broach the possibility of the impossible, the fact that the impossible can occur. As a result, political philosophy has generally confined itself to a restricted conception of change, and this is what the theory of rupture aims to amend.

Our claim is not that power doesn't exist but that it is a secondary phenomenon. Power is not necessarily opposed to rupture: it can even organize itself around and work to sustain rupture. But however a society organizes power relations, the status of rupture has primacy because rupture occurs prior to power relations and creates the values that underwrite them. Power in society exists on the basis of a rupture that gives the members of the society something to struggle for. Without an initial rupture that continues to reverberate, there would be no reason to take power. Of course, those in power most often attempt to repress rupture and the values that it entails. They stress continuity rather than interruption.[2] But nothing necessitates that power take up this role. Rupture is not found only in revolt but can also manifest itself in the operations of power—which is to say that the theory of rupture does not embrace revolt or resistance for its own sake. The fetishization of resistance is a way of avoiding the traumatic consequences of rupture by never following it to its completion.[3] Rupture doesn't entail an allergy to power.

The fact that rupture takes place has concrete ontological implications. Being cannot be one or a whole in which all beings remain in their places.

Rather than a harmony of being, there is disjunction and antagonism. The existence of historical ruptures testifies to a divide within being itself. In this sense, avowing the fact of historical change functions as an ontological claim, and ontology has for us a clear political bearing. Political acts are possible and transformative change can occur because being is always at odds with itself, and this self-division is both destabilizing and productive.

The origin of the theory of rupture lies not in traditional political philosophy or even in the recent critique of this philosophy. It is located, instead, in traditional metaphysics. Though twentieth-century thought devoted itself to overcoming metaphysics in different ways, the metaphysical tradition holds within it a revolutionary kernel that one can employ for rethinking politics. The rethinking of politics through metaphysics is the object of this book. The revolutionary kernel of metaphysics appears from the beginning of Plato's thought, though his aristocratic political philosophy necessarily obscures it.[4] That is, Plato's political thought hides the radicality of the politics implicit in his metaphysics.

When Plato develops the theory of ideal forms, he inaugurates a break within being itself that subsequent metaphysical thought sustains. He divides the world into appearances and forms, granting ultimate reality to ideal forms rather than to empirical appearances. With this move, Plato changes the way that subjects relate to the world and to its truth. The everyday world becomes a shadow theater replete with illusion while truth comes to reside in the ideal forms that subtend this world. The revolutionary dimension of the shift in perspective that Plato introduces is apparent in the Allegory of the Cave from the opening of Book VII of the *Republic*. Plato's metaphysical rupture divides being between the underground deception in which most people live and the enlightened surface where philosophers who escape their chains see the truth. But one does not have to accept the particulars of Plato's philosophy to accept his metaphysical insistence on rupture.

Though it denies the truth of our everyday experience, the distinction that Plato draws nonetheless has something politically valuable. By insisting on a division within being, Plato provides the first concrete theorization of freedom from nature and from ruling social arrangements, a freedom that stems from the act of positing an ideal world. This act is the first concrete attempt to theorize a divide within being itself, a divide that produces the separation between the true world and the everyday world of appearances. If metaphysics in the end finds a ground that heals the rupture it opens in being, the most important aspect of metaphysical speculation is the rupture itself and the break that it allows.[5]

The metaphysical rupture becomes clearer in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and fully explicit in that of Hegel. While Plato divides the world between appearances and ideal forms, Kant sees an epistemological division between appearances and things in themselves. These are, for Kant, two different ways of conceiving objects, and the knowing subject cannot escape this divided approach to the world.[6] Hegel ontologizes Kant's epistemological division, so that the split between appearances and things in themselves occurs not in the knowing subject but in being itself. A rupture divides the subject's knowledge of the world because a rupture animates the world. What Hegel avows is the genuinely original dimension of rupture: a rupture is, as it were, fully its own cause, and this is why it creates such a stumbling block for knowledge. If being were not divided and at odds with itself, then Kant would not be able to create the distinction between appearance and the thing in itself.

The rupture within being is the condition of possibility for the rupture within knowledge. This is Hegel's contribution to metaphysics and to the theory of rupture. For the first time, with Hegel, we can know rupture as such. What we know of rupture is a unique kind of knowledge—what Hegel calls absolute knowledge. Hegel's conception of absolute knowledge does not represent an act of overcoming rupture through thought but rather an act of avowing it as fundamental and unsurpassable. Absolute knowledge occurs when one grasps that rupture is inextricable from the nature of being, and it makes explicit the hidden priority that rupture has throughout all metaphysical speculation.

The political achievement in Kant and Hegel's philosophy does not reside in their political philosophy. Kant's hope for a future of perpetual peace and Hegel's embrace of constitutional monarchy fail to integrate the radical nature of the rupture in their metaphysical thought. They produce a line of political thought that fits too smoothly with the history of political philosophy and concerns the distribution of power. As a result, the key to understanding them as political thinkers lies in translating their metaphysical insights into political ones.[7] Hegel brings metaphysics to its most complete expression, and in doing so, he renders visible a new terrain for politics that has remained unexplored.[8] This is the terrain of rupture. Exploring this terrain involves putting to bed the attempt to overcome metaphysics in favor of embracing anew metaphysical speculation while seeing within it an urgent political cause. This is a project that others have already begun to embark on.

Though the term itself remains outside contemporary intellectual debates, the idea of rupture has recently gained much currency in a variety of forms. Major voices in contemporary philosophy now theorize a re-

turn to rupture and, at the same time, a return to the assertion of discredited political values. The most well-known of these voices are, among others, Alain Badiou, Giorgio Agamben, and Slavoj Žižek, but they also include Catherine Malabou, Joan Copjec, Jacques Rancière, Walter Davis, Alenka Zupančič, Kojin Karatani, and Lee Edelman. By quickly surveying the philosophies of some of these thinkers, the central role that rupture has for contemporary thought will become evident, despite the different guises under which it appears.

Badiou, Agamben, and Žižek give voice to a concept and practice of politics that does not begin with the content of signification—which cannot be the bearer of rupture—but with the irreducibly rupturing act of signification as such. When Badiou, Agamben, and Žižek conceive political change, they do not begin with signifiers that are already meaningful or with the transpiring of a rupture whose goals and outcomes are already calculated in advance (and thus continuous with the being of politics that precedes rupture). Each argues instead for the salience of a signifier of rupture—a proper name, a gesture, an act—that separates them both from traditional political philosophy and from the wholly oppositional reaction against it. By looking at what they have in common, we can see possibilities for developing the politics of rupture.

Each theorist has a different name for this political position, but despite particular variances, the fundamental gesture is the same—organizing one's existence through the rupture rather than through some symbolic network that confers a sense of identity. For Badiou, the subject of truth affirms fidelity to the rupture of the event and lives within the situation according to consequences of the event. This subject, like Christ's disciples, remains in the situational world but is no longer of that world. Agamben takes a different tack for envisioning how one might occupy the rupture, and it involves an embrace of potentiality and gesture. Potentiality ensures that the world of signification remains incomplete—it accomplishes a break with actuality—and through attention to gesture, one sustains the incompletion that potentiality inaugurates. For his part, Žižek identifies the death drive as the mode through which one inhabits the rupture. Through the death drive, the subject attaches itself to loss and thereby divests itself from the world of sense that ideology underwrites.[9] Fidelity, gesture, and death drive mark the different but homologous paths by which one might inhabit the point of rupture rather than just registering its fleeting existence.

Through fidelity to the event and its rupture, as Badiou sees it, one subtracts oneself from the world that one inhabits. The militant of the event does not accept the calculable consistency that the world of time and

representation offers but instead opts for the possibility of inconsistency, and the emergence of truth—in the sense of a radical beginning—that inconsistency makes possible. This act of subtraction involves abandoning both one's network of symbolic support and one's sense of being a distinct individual. Badiou claims that "*a subject subtracts itself from every community and destroys every individuation.*"[10] This notion informs Badiou's valorization of Jesus as an "anonymous variable, a 'someone' devoid of predicative traits, entirely absorbed by his resurrection."[11] Inseparable from this escape is the marked transformation of time itself.[12] Even though the militant of the event finds value in the event, this value does not provide the assurance or guarantee of continuity and symbolization that the world of time and representation does. Willing to eschew security, the faithful militant exists in a constant state of risk without any established forms of knowledge to fall back on. All that the faithful militant has to fall back on is a truth that is transtemporal or eternal, and all the more opaque for being so. Courage thus has an absolute value in Badiou's philosophy. This is not the courage of the hero who races against time so as to return time to its normalcy, but rather the courage to forsake extant notions of time in favor of bringing a truth to the fore. Without courage, the subject could not subtract itself and adhere to the consequences of the event, and to the actuality of the truth of rupture itself.

Though he has other, more privileged examples of fidelity to the event, Pierre Boulez serves an important role in Badiou's thought precisely because he is not a legendary figure like Saint Paul or Robespierre. Confronted with the modernist event in music, introduced by Arnold Schönberg and developed by Alban Berg and Anton Webern, Boulez adopts the position of a militant. This involves, as Badiou describes it in the *Logics of Worlds,* ruthlessly denouncing the French music of the time in order to bring it in line with the modernist event. As Badiou puts it, "Boulez didn't hesitate to introduce a certain dose of terror into his public polemics."[13] The turn to terror is necessary to free Boulez and the rest of France from their entrapment in the dominant form of musical production, which remained in the classical style. By achieving fidelity to the modernist event, Boulez loses the national tradition that had underwritten musical existence in France, but this loss is also a gain of freedom. It frees him to take up a different relation with others, in which everyone can be a part of the new universality that modernist music promises. This changed relation to others is also the point of Agamben's emphasis on gesture.

Through gesture, we relate to others differently than we do when we rely on words. Agamben sees in gesture the key to our political being. It is not that we must stop speaking and start using only gestures but that we

must change our way of relating to language itself. Through adopting an emphasis on gesture, we lift language out of the logic of means and ends that blinds us to the signifier's rupture. Language remains a means, but the means—the medium—becomes an end in itself. Because the gesture highlights the means rather than obscuring the means in the grandeur of the end, it is the basis for all political acts. As Agamben puts it, "*Politics is the sphere of pure means, that is, of the absolute and complete gesturality of human beings.*"[14] The great political acts, for Agamben, are not so much fiery speeches or violent uprisings but gestures that return us to the break that the signifier inaugurates.

The political power of the gesture is evident in the black power salute given by Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the Olympics in Mexico City in 1968.[15] This gesture blocked the signification of the medal ceremony and occasioned an international outrage. Though it was clearly political, it didn't communicate a clearly defined political message but instead interrupted the nationalistic pride that the Olympic Games aim to produce. The gesture of the gloved hand raised in the air during the American national anthem forced spectators to confront the signifier as such without the safety net that the typical avenues of communication provide. The International Olympic Committee expelled Smith and Carlos from the Olympic village because they had interrupted the intended communication and thereby accessed the original rupture of language.[16] The gesture of Smith and Carlos accomplished a pure experience of language that could not be hidden or translated into something national, territorial, or parochial.

In contrast to fidelity to the event and to gesture, the death drive appears to be more individual than collective. It marks the singularity of the subject rather than the subject's connection to others. But it is this break from others that gives the death drive, for Žižek, its political import. Žižek's definition of the death drive departs significantly from the usual understanding of Freud's concept. It is not, for Žižek, a drive to die or to return to an inanimate state (as Freud describes it in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*) but an immortal process. In the death drive, subjects insist on their enjoyment above all else and sacrifice everything on behalf of this enjoyment.[17] This insistence brooks no boundaries and thus typically entails—in contrast to the pursuit of pleasure—disastrous self-destruction for the subject. By acceding to the logic of the death drive, the subject divests itself from the symbolic world.

Žižek's favorite instance of accession to the death drive is Antigone. Though he sometimes criticizes himself and other psychoanalytic thinkers for relying too heavily on this example, he always returns to it. This is be-

cause from the beginning of Sophocles's play Antigone exists in isolation from all the other characters as a result of her relationship to the death drive. Her insistence on burying her brother has the effect of separating her from the world, as evinced by the play's opening scene, in which Antigone becomes estranged from her sister, Ismene. Though her indifference to the law has a different motivation than Saint Paul's, the effect is very similar. Even buried alive in a cave by Creon, she has a freedom that those committed to the law can never experience. But her individual act also has concrete social ramifications. By remaining in the death drive, Antigone reintroduces the founding rupture of the law back into the law. The contingency of Creon's authority becomes evident for everyone else to see. In this sense, acceding to the death drive is every bit a form of politics as is fidelity to the event or attention to gesture.

Though the political action that Badiou, Agamben, and Žižek envision differs considerably at times, there is a through line that holds their contrasting notions together, that of the sustainability of rupture. Another version of rupture is evident in Catherine Malabou's notion of plasticity, which is the capacity for a complete transformation. Though she finds the roots of this idea in Hegel's philosophy, Malabou sees proof of plasticity in those she calls the new wounded, those who suffer from brain injuries and lose all relation to their former symbolic identity. The new wounded are not just contemporary anomalies but reveal the obscured status of all subjects. As she puts it, "We are at every instant susceptible to becoming the *new wounded,* the prototypes of ourselves, without an essential relation with the past form of our identity."[18] Though Malabou obviously views the severe brain injury as a tragedy, she also sees in it the fundamental plasticity of identity, her way of conceiving our capacity for rupture.

Walter Davis, in contrast, locates this capacity in the traumatic moments of history. With the bombing of Hiroshima, for instance, Davis sees the birth of a new form of subjectivity that reshapes politics altogether. Though he spends most of his book *Deracination* detailing the flight from the trauma of Hiroshima, he also conceives of the political transformation that this impossible event inaugurates. For Davis, the encounter with the trauma of the dialectical image has the potential to change our lives entirely, to give us a new direction oriented around the horror that we previously fled. Like Malabou's plasticity and Žižek's death drive, Davis's historical trauma points toward the importance of rupture without naming it or fully theorizing it as the foundation for politics as such. It is this theorization that we hope to work out in the pages that follow.

In order to work out the political possibilities of rupture, it is not a matter of choosing between them or synthesizing their thought but rather

adopting their shared point of departure. Rupture is not just a moment that quickly disappears but a recurring point within the symbolic structure that testifies to that structure's constitutive incompleteness. It is the point where politics begins and ends, and our political task consists in finding ways to inhabit this point without falling back into a secure sense of identity. The political subject exists within the rupture, and rupture is the absent foundation for all the values that inform our political struggles.

The fundamental question of politics is not how to assume or contest power but how one relates to rupture. Rupture names a different starting point for political theory. That is to say, political theory involves neither the specification of this or that investiture of power in the name of a just or fair or stable society, nor the eschewal of power altogether. The rupturing break from, for instance, the natural world or tradition represents the moment at which values emerge. Within the logic of the rupture, all subjects are irreducibly singular and free. The rupture frees individuals from the despotic rule of nature or tradition, and it constitutes them as singular subjects. But it also introduces a principle of equality that binds subjects to one another in an experience of human solidarity. Belief, universality, solidarity, equality, freedom, singularity, and humanity are neither natural values nor the achievement of culture. They are the product of the rupture that causes culture to arise out of nature or the rupture that causes a new social order to emerge from an older one. Rupture marks the creation of value out of nothing, and the paradigm for this creation is the emergence of signification itself.[19]

Signifying and Subtraction

The theory of rupture is first and foremost a theory of signification. The signifier emerges out of the rupture in being, and all signification centers around this rupture. If being were whole or full, if there were no gap in being, there would be no ontological room for the signifier. In other words, it's not as if the natural world were in a state of equilibrium before humans began to speak and disrupted it. In fact, the illusion of a prior equilibrium is itself an effect of the signifier, which occasions a revolutionary change in the world that transforms not only the present but also the past. Once the signifier emerges, what came before begins to exist in the terms that the signifier introduces. But we can know retroactively that there was space for this emergence because the very existence of the signifier attests to a gap in being. The signifier doesn't respond to this gap by healing it, which is the implicit assertion of Jürgen Habermas's theory of

communicative rationality. The signifier emerges out of a rupture in being and repeats this rupture. It is a product of the natural world's self-division that then divides subjects from the natural world, leaving them in a second nature of mediation.

A revolutionary break occurs when human animals enter into language and become subjects of the signifier. As subjects of the signifier, we relate to the world not through a system of needs but through desire, which emerges as a result of the effects of the signifier on our natural body. As Jacques Lacan points out, in contrast to other animals, for human subjects "there is no . . . state of pure need. From the origin, need is motivated on the plane of desire, that is to say, of something that is destined in man to have a certain relationship with the signifier."[20] Not only do we often desire what we don't need, but we also have desires that threaten our needs, such as the desire for a romantic partner who would endanger our psychic stability or the desire to put our lives at risk for the sake of excitement alone. No one needs to go bungee jumping, but many people desire to do so. Roller coasters fulfill no needs, but they nonetheless attract millions. Even the desires that seem to clearly have their basis in needs have undergone a complete deformation. The desire for chocolate cake stems, of course, from the need for food, but if we evaluated our food sources solely in terms of our need, there would be more suitable desires. The desirability of chocolate cake is an index of the signifier's transformative effect. It creates a gap between need and desire that ensures a nonnatural existence for the speaking being.[21]

But at the same time as it initiates a dramatic cut, the signifier hides the evidence of what it has done. It obscures its rupturing power by focusing our attention not on itself—that is, not on the act of signifying—but on what it signifies. The content of signification obscures the gap introduced by the signifier by providing a world of sense that appears complete and continuous. The opposition between the signifier and the signified is at once the opposition between rupture and continuity. While the signifier considered in itself bears the mark of its initial disruption, the signified offers us the assurance of a world replete with meaning and lacking nothing.[22] Sense itself enacts a repression of the signifying rupture, allowing us to associate signifiers with their meaning rather than with the emergence of the signifier as such. Once we enter into sense, it functions as a closed world in which every element has a signification. Meaning appears ubiquitous and eternal. The meaningful totality of the signified world obscures the scandal of the signifier's emergence.

When subjects interact, their conscious attention is almost always on the meaning that others are trying to convey with the signifiers they em-

ploy. Our focus on the signified at the expense of the signifier allows us to inhabit a stable world in which meaning is guaranteed. What our interlocutors say hides the fact that they are saying it. The signifiers that they use seem to signify meanings that exist outside of and prior to the act of signification. We don't see, for instance, how attaching the signifier "lake" to a body of water denaturalizes the body of water and brings a new entity into existence, though this is precisely what occurs. Though the word doesn't physically create the material entity, it does create the distinction that identifies that entity. This distinction is an effect of rupture, but we don't see the creative power of the signifying rupture. The signified world of meaning is the world that we consciously inhabit, and moments when the signifier becomes obvious are moments when the scandal of the signifier intrudes into this world.[23]

Ironically, one of the principal forms of the repression of the signifier's scandal has been the considerable attention that twentieth-century thought paid to the signifier. Both continental and analytic philosophy effected a linguistic turn that made signification the central philosophical turf of the twentieth century. For the former, Ferdinand de Saussure initiated this turn, and it resulted in the intellectual predominance of structuralism. For the latter, the key originating figures were Gottlob Frege and Ludwig Wittgenstein, and the formal analysis of language became the foundation of the analytic tradition. But in neither case was this devotion to the signifier an attempt to acknowledge the rupture of signification. Instead, both traditions effectively reduced being to signification and thereby furthered the repression of the signifying rupture.

Both Saussure and Frege take the signifying structure of language as a given, and neither places any emphasis on the fact of its emergence. The analysis of the structure assumes that the structure exists, which has the effect of obscuring the rupture that the signifier introduces. Saussure describes how signification functions through difference, while Frege attempts to theorize signification or logic as the basis for mathematics. In both cases, the signifier doesn't mark a rupture but provides a basis for understanding other domains. For their theoretical descendants, signification continues to function as the given that explains other structures, as is the case when Claude Lévi-Strauss uses it to understand structures of kinship or logical positivists see it as a model for analyzing all statements.

In contrast to both structuralism and logical positivism, Jacques Lacan, who was influenced by both Saussure and Frege, turns his attention to the rupturing effects of the signifier. Lacan's distance from structuralism (with which he is often linked) is marked by his adherence to the signifier's emergence rather than to the structure it inaugurates. Lacan identi-

fies the radical kernel of the linguistic turn as the cut in being that the signifier illuminates, and he is able to grasp this because of his position as a psychoanalyst. The cut gives birth to the subject and the unconscious.[24]

The unconscious is the register of the signifier's rupture. It is what remains of the revolutionary cut that occurs with the emergence of the signifier. This is why psychoanalysis pays attention not to the signified but to the signifier itself. The fundamental rule of psychoanalysis—one must say everything that comes to one's mind without censoring oneself—has its origin in the relationship between the signifier and the unconscious. For the psychoanalyst, what someone says is always more important than what someone means; the signifier used is never reducible to its signified.[25] This is especially evident in slips of the tongue, where the signifier reveals an unconscious truth that the signified masks. The attempt to correct myself after a slip by providing the signified that I intended never suffices to alter the experience of a break in the world of meaning.[26] The slip marks a moment when the signifier overwhelms the signified, and the signifying cut becomes fully apparent. Slips of the tongue are not merely personal: societies commit them every bit as much as individuals. The social order's slip occurs at moments when, for instance, the façade of inequality is broken during a catastrophe and the equality of all subjects becomes evident.

Obviously, one cannot spend all one's time making slips of the tongue without diluting and finally mitigating their rupturing power. The slip, like rupture itself, is necessarily momentary. But it is possible to commit oneself to the position that the slip opens up. This is the politics of rupture, and it occurs when we pay attention to the act of signification itself rather than to what has been signified. Rather than interpreting the slip as a momentary disruption of the signified world, we can interpret it as the center of that world. The slip becomes the model form of signification because it allows us to see what successful signification obscures.

The Paradox of Capitalist Modernity

The most dramatic rupture in human history after the emergence of the signifier did not take place in the realm of philosophy. Capitalist modernity repeats the founding gesture of signification and thereby effectuates the most decisive subsequent break. After this break, all traditional society will exist as a homogeneous alternative to modernity. Traditional society in retrospect will be stable, centered, and relatively unchanging. It will have its excesses, but they will always remain localized at a specific

site or in a specific superstition or figure, like that of the ruler or the monarch. Capitalist modernity, in contrast, will uproot all stable identities, undermine the idea of a center, and unleash excess throughout the social body. The sine qua non of this excess, of course, lies in the very values of productivity and profitability, which have no ultimate signified and which end up colliding with and exploding extant conceptions of property and the customary uses to which land, even if privately owned, were put.

As Ellen Meiksins Wood has shown, in the English countryside of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, the Lockean notion that land must be improved (i.e., made more and more productive and profitable) fueled the wholesale redefinition of property rights known as enclosure. According to Wood, more than simply fencing off common lands and fields of the English countryside, "enclosure meant the extinction, with or without physical fencing of land, of common and customary use rights on which many people depended for their livelihood."[27] Land that might once have been farmed communally—in which certain members of an agrarian community might have enjoyed various rights (to have their animals graze, to collect firewood, to collect the leavings of the harvest)—now, because these rights interfered with the productivity and profitability of the land, grew to be defined legally as the private and exclusively owned land of landholders. Enclosed land thus became the land of industrious landholders who appropriated commonly possessed land or land with use rights that overlapped. To make their land more productive and profitable was to cement their entitlement to exclusive ownership of it. The effect on social relations of this capitalist concern with productivity and profitability was calamitous—with displaced and dispossessed small farmers disturbing the social order of the English countryside via riots or migration to London, creating the mass of laborers that enabled the emergence of an industrially capitalist England.

This type of upheaval is indicative of the capitalist rupture. As Marx and Engels famously describe it in *The Communist Manifesto,* "Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind."[28] Any attempt to reserve a sacred place outside the process of production and commodification necessarily fails in modernity. Everything is for sale or at least reducible to the logic of the com-

modity. Whereas the rupture of signification gives rise to various concrete values, the rupture of capitalist modernity gives rise to the abstract value form—and this form is embodied by the commodity.

The profanation of the holy that Marx and Engels identify in the *Manifesto* has an opposite side that is equally significant: the sacralization of the profane object in the form of the commodity. The commodity is not just an object that one buys and sells but a manifestation of the sacred. Through the commodity structure, capitalist modernity disseminates the excess once consigned to religious ceremonies. Religion recedes from daily life in capitalist modernity because the commodity infuses it with a different manifestation of the sacred. Every exchange—and thus every interaction—is an encounter with excess as it manifests itself in the sublimity of the commodity. One exchanges for an object invested with surplus value each time that one exchanges. Traditional society appears stable because it confines excess to a central, theological site. Capitalist modernity involves constant upheaval because excess seeps into every moment of our daily existence.[29]

The rupture that inaugurates capitalist modernity continues to exist through the value of the commodity, which is produced in the labor process and sustained through the act of consumption. As Marx shows, the profit that capitalists gain from the exchange process originates not from an unequal exchange—not even the exchange of the capitalist's money for the worker's labor time is unequal—but from the surplus value that the worker's labor creates.[30] Though the capitalist pays the worker fairly for the worker's labor, this labor produces an excess that is not compensated. The worker's labor time creates more value than the capitalist pays for it, and the capitalist ultimately transforms this excess into a profit.[31] Surplus value sacralizes the commodity and imbues it with a mysteriousness that cannot be reduced to sense or calculation. We experience the sacred nature of the commodity every day, and the sellers of commodities do what they can to build up their sacred qualities. But we seldom notice what makes the commodity sacred.

Just as a focus on the signified represses the scandal of the signifier, a focus on profit and exchange represses the scandal of the creation of value through labor. Though profit depends on surplus value, profit obscures its origin in production and presents itself as the result of commodities being sold for more than their value (which is how capitalism understands profit). In perhaps the key passage of the third volume of *Capital*, Marx explains the relationship between profit and surplus value, and in doing so he shows how the focus on profit has the effect of hiding the rupture that occurs when the worker produces value. Marx says

> profit is still for all that a transformed form of surplus-value, a form in which its origin and the secret of its existence are veiled and obliterated. In point of fact, profit is the form of appearance of surplus-value, and the latter can be sifted out from the former only by analysis. In surplus-value, the relationship between capital and labour is laid bare. In the relationship between capital and profit, i.e. between capital and surplus-value as it appears on the one hand as an excess of the cost price of the commodity realized in the circulation process and on the other hand as an excess determined more precisely by its relationship to the total capital, *capital appears as a relationship to itself*, a relationship in which it is distinguished, as an original sum of value, from another new value that it posits. It appears to consciousness as if capital creates this new value in the course of its movement through the production and circulation processes.[32]

Consciousness of profit deceives us concerning the rupture of surplus value produced by labor. Profit is at once the result of surplus value and its repression.

The key point here is that even if one rejects—as many economists do today—Marx's theory of surplus value, his analysis of the repression of labor nonetheless holds. The concept of profit obscures the role that labor plays in its creation and hides the rupture from the natural world that occurs when human beings begin to labor. Capitalism's ubiquitous emphasis on profit enables us not to see labor's rupture. Whereas labor creates something out of nothing, value out of material substance, profit uses an existent value to produce a greater value. In this sense, it is the repression of rupture, no matter what one thinks of its relationship to surplus value.

Capitalist modernity represses its founding rupture (and the continued existence of this rupture in the form of the labor embodied in the commodity) by disguising the role that production plays in the creation of value. Capitalism represents a genuine rupture, but it also represents the constant abandonment of this rupture through its fundamental refusal to recognize the source of value and to integrate this recognition into the system. A capitalism that sustained fidelity to rupture would cease to be capitalism because the producers of value in such a system would control the means of production. Which is to say, a capitalism that sustained fidelity to rupture would be a form of communism.

But in actually existing capitalism, both the capitalist's and the consumer's focus on the act of exchange forges a sense of stability within modernity's disruption of traditional society. The focus on exchange hides the central role that rupture plays in modernity. Unlike the act of production (in which value is created), the act of exchange appears to belong to

a self-contained world in which nothing is created or destroyed. The laws of supply and demand, like structuralism's laws of signification, govern the exchange and render it meaningful, allowing us to avoid thinking about how value is created. Instead, preoccupation with exchange begins with the assumption that value exists. The time that capitalists spend trying to figure out how to maximize profit or consumers spend trying to save money on their purchases is time specifically not devoted to considering the rupture that occurs with the creation of value. Rather than attending to the creation of value, which is the modern event, daily life in capitalist modernity is occupied by the distribution of value. This concern with the distribution of value instead of its emergence mirrors political philosophy's concern with the distribution of power instead of its emergence. Capitalist modernity repeats both the rupture and the repression that occurs with the signifier.

The repression of the rupture that occurs with the production of surplus value does not go on without a hitch. Modernity has its slips of the tongue, though they might not occur as often as they do in the system of signification. These slips occur when the producers of value become aware of their foundational role within the system and attempt to seize the means of production. The major occurrences of mass forms of this awareness were the 1871 Paris Commune, the 1917 Soviet Revolution, and 1949 Chinese Revolution. But it also crops up more frequently in the form of strikes, popular revolts, and workers' demonstrations. At these times, the recognition that value derives from rupture—from labor's production of value—returns.

What is significant about these returns of modernity's repressed is not their eventual defeat: the triumph of French nationalist forces over the Paris Commune, Stalin's purges, or China's Great Leap Forward and its eventual turn to capitalism. Rather it is the mere existence of the rupture that testifies to the continued power of the scandal of modernity. Each revolutionary moment holds within it the secret of modernity's lasting appeal, even as that appeal becomes obscured by the innumerable commodities of the exchange process. The revolutionary moment is not simply a moment but another form of life that exists alongside and within the illusory stability of exchange society. The revolutionary moment is a space that one can make central even long after the revolution is past.

The Conservative Version

A genuinely political rupture cannot name or calculate its outcomes in advance. It cannot even specify or symbolize completely the content of its cause. In this way, rupture—in the sense in which we are advocating it—cannot be tarnished with the pox of the horrors of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In our view, Nazism, its genocidal successors, and contemporary fundamentalist violence are the exemplars of spurious ruptures: rather than make visible the divided nature of being, they seek to heal the division in being and make it whole. This is why a politics aimed at the proper distribution of power misses where the true struggle lies: rather than argue over the rationale for this or that allocation of power, theory today must clarify the very source of the values on which politics depends.

The distribution of power always occurs within what Alain Badiou calls a situation—the everyday arrangement of society. No matter how drastically we change the distribution of power within the situation, we cannot disrupt the monotony that characterizes the situation. Within the situation, everything is given, and the situation demands that subjects accept its givens. Existence purely within a situation leaves us with nothing to live for and with no cause to rouse our desire. It is a dull and banal existence because it is constituted through the repression of the rupturing cut, which stimulates and gives value to our lives. The point is not to mitigate the dreariness of the situation—transforming the distribution of power—but to escape this dreariness altogether.

The situation, which assigns identity through equivalence and counting, has no place for the irreducible singularity of the subject.[33] Though proper names provide an apparent singularity for different participants in the situation, every being within the logic of the situation is exchangeable with every other. I occupy a certain position within the factory or the office; I inhabit a certain location within a particular city; I earn some amount of money; I define myself through the purchase of various commodities. In each of these ways of being, I remain replaceable and lack any singularity. Someone else could take my place in the office; someone else could adopt my particular style of dress. In the situation, I am a particular being, but I am never a singular being. Particularity within the situation cannot rise to the level of singularity.

Even if the distribution of power were to change radically—if as a proletarian I gained access with my fellow workers to control of the state—this newfound power would leave me still without the irreducible singularity that would constitute me as a subject. Within the logic of the situation, those with power abandon their singularity just as fully as those without. The CEO is as much a replaceable quantity as the worker on the assembly line. Conceived in terms of power (which is the logic of the situation), identity is always quantifiable. As a result, the situation provides an infinite number of identities, but it provides no place for sub-

jectivity, however we imagine the distribution of power. The subject can exist only through the rupture.

But championing rupture is a fraught enterprise that historically has more in common with conservative politics than with Leftist politics. Conservatives readily see a divide within being and work to position themselves on one side with their enemies on the other. In fact, adherence to the cut seems almost inherently conservative, if not reactionary, because it enables the kind of radical, moral distinctions that are the lifeblood of conservativism and the bane of progressive liberalism. The cut allows George W. Bush and the pundits of the Right to say that you are either with us or you are with the terrorists, just as it allows Nazi Germany to divide its population between those who belong and those who can be gassed.

The emphasis on the dividing cut is not confined to conservative politicians but proliferates among conservative political theorists as well. Most conservative theorists emphasize a radical division within being as the basis for their conservatism. For instance, Carl Schmitt insists on an absolute distinction between the friend and the enemy, without which life in common, public life, would disintegrate. He notes, "The enemy is solely the public enemy, because everything that has a relationship to such a collectivity of men, particularly to a whole nation, becomes public by virtue of such a relationship."[34] The enemy doesn't just work to destroy the state but actually constitutes the sense of a public bond within it, which is why no state can do without the friend/enemy distinction.

With Samuel Huntington (author of *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order,* what was for some time the neoconservative bible), the insistence on rupture is even more profound. With the end of the Cold War, Huntington sees the prospect of the disappearance of division in the world, and this leads him to propose a new framework for discerning division. Rather than ideological rupture, civilizational rupture comes to define the new world that Huntington envisions. For Huntington, the split between different civilizations is unavoidable, and he cautions against any intercivilizational bonds—between, say, the United States and China—which will be inherently fragile and tenous. The civilizational cut demands a commitment to security, military buildup, and unending suspicion, which is why it warms the conservative heart.[35]

Conservatives like Schmitt and Huntington are drawn to the idea of the cut or rupture because avowing the external rupture leads to internal stability. We can see an identical avowal in Iran, where propaganda repeatedly casts the protests of the June 2009 Green Revolution as the

work of the United States or Zionist entities in order to play up a civilizational clash between the United States (Jewish or liberal democracy) and Iran (Islamic republic). In the case of Iran, we should thus endorse the difficult notion that the most productive support the United States might give to democratic revolutionaries is no real support at all. The more the United States meddles—either in the form of congressional legislation or presidential pronouncement—the more a warrant exists for seeing the enemy or the competing civilization as a justification for stability within the state and in this way limiting the possibilities for political disturbance. The rupture in the world becomes, for the conservative thinker or theocratic regime, an argument for securing one's position within the situation. In the face of the danger that the rupture represents, the potentially antagonistic elements of a state—proletariat and bourgeoisie, black and white, male and female, and so on—will come together in the face of an external enemy.

In its conservative version, rupture never occurs for its own sake but in order to secure identity. This is most evident in the case of Nazism, where the rupture from Germany's past and from the impurities in German society serves not to create political values but to solidify the identity of garden-variety Germans. Under Nazism, as with all Rightist invocations of rupture, the role that the formation of identity plays testifies to the falsity of the rupture. As Slavoj Žižek argues, "Hitler staged a spectacle of revolution so that the capitalist order could survive."[36] The conservative rupture, even in its most extreme versions, is always a rupture in name only. The cut acts as a form of suturing.

For the theorist of rupture, however, this is precisely what is not allowed. To retreat from the rupture, to use the rupture as an argument for securing one's position within the situation, amounts to a violation of the possibility that the rupture inaugurates. Failing to be adequate to the rupture in being condemns one to the meaninglessness of a life saturated with meaning. The retreat from the rupture to the safety of the situation provides one with an infinite quantity of significations and opportunities for identification, but it also entails missing the crucial point of signification. What is valuable about the signifier is not the meanings or identities that it offers but instead the arousal and desire associated with its emergence. By adhering to the rupture, we sustain ourselves at the point of the signifier's emergence. We experience its contingency—the fact that the signifier might not have emerged and that we nonetheless owe everything to its emergence—and our radical freedom that results from this contingency. Freedom requires embracing rupture instead of using it to justify a retreat into the blandishments of situational security.

A Ruptureless Century

Rupture is the result of a split in being, and in this sense it is a thoroughly materialist theory. But the effect of rupture—its capacity for reorienting social relations and inaugurating political values—depends on its recognition. In this sense, then, there is an idealist dimension to the theory of rupture. It requires a philosophical apparatus capable of foregrounding its political centrality. Such an apparatus was, for the most part, missing in the twentieth century. Without a way of granting rupture its foundational role, its occurrences inevitably fizzle, and this occurs time and again.

If metaphysics theorized rupture from Plato to Hegel, twentieth-century thought in almost all its manifestations has beaten a path away from it (though there are limited exceptions). We can identity five major lines of Western thought that achieved some dominance in the twentieth century—phenomenology, structuralism, analytic philosophy, vitalism, and Marxism—and in each case, their very form represents a turn away from the idea of rupture. In this sense, almost all twentieth-century thought shares Martin Heidegger's goal of "overcoming metaphysics." Though Heidegger explicitly aims at doing away with the ultimate ground that metaphysics seeks, he—along with most of twentieth-century philosophy—simultaneously loses the idea of rupture that comes to a head with Hegel.

Phenomenology takes the subject's experience as its point of departure and thus appears to participate in the Cartesian rupture that gives birth to modern subjectivity—or even to extend this rupture. But in the attempt to locate the subject in the space and time of its experience, phenomenology minimizes the subject's rupture with its environment. The subject, for a phenomenologist like Heidegger, has spatial and temporal coordinates and hence is not actually a subject at all. It is not a Cartesian cogito ripped out of its context but a Dasein, a being with a definite thereness or place.[37] Phenomenology's effort to remain true to the experience of subjectivity ends up missing the most important fact of subjectivity—its irreducibility to space and time. What phenomenology takes as the overarching error of metaphysical speculation—the refusal to consider the lived actuality of the thinking subject—is, for us, the genius of metaphysics.

In the case of Edmund Husserl (in contrast to Heidegger), we can see how phenomenology loses the idea of the subject's rupture from space and time while retaining the subject. The rupture between the subject and its world is only a pseudorupture for Husserl: it transpires within the subject itself. Husserl notes, "Every imaginable sense, every imaginable being, whether the latter is called immanent or transcendent, falls

within the domain of transcendental subjectivity, as the subjectivity that constitutes sense and being."[38] The subject's consciousness functions as an absolute limit that contains everything—even transcendence. Transcendence becomes, like the subject itself, a manifestation of its context rather than an excess that sticks out from its original location. At every turn, phenomenology reduces subjects to their location.

Structuralism performs a different form of contextualization. While phenomenology retains a version of the subject, structuralism eliminates it altogether. The subject becomes nothing but the determinants of the social structure. The structure speaks the subject at the moment the subject believes itself to be articulating its individual desire. Kinship relations, for Claude Lévi-Strauss, produce the individuals that they demand, and there is no room for the subject who doesn't fit—that is, for the subject as such. Though there are different structures, there is no space within any structure for the subject's rupture. Individuals in a structure are thus at pains to see how their very being testifies to a fundamental opening in the structure, and to a capacity to inaugurate new structures.

Rupture appears to survive in the thought of someone like Lévi-Strauss through the break between nature and culture. Lévi-Strauss emphasizes this break and even gives it a central place in his theory of culture. It is, according to Lévi-Strauss, the prohibition of incest that constitutes the transition from nature to culture, and this break is absolute in his thought.[39] But this rupture does not have an impact within the structure itself, except in the form of the structure's binary division. But this division lacks any excessive content. Rupture inaugurates the structure and then effectively disappears, along with the subject who represents its sustained importance.

The hints of rupture that appear in phenomenology and structuralism are almost entirely absent from twentieth-century analytic philosophy. Though analytic philosophy is a diverse program, its various philosophical branches take part in the turn away from rupture. Ludwig Wittgenstein, a parent figure of analytic philosophy, reduces apparent ruptures to philosophical misunderstandings about the nature of language. The idea of subjectivity, as Wittgenstein sees it, emerges from a grammatical construction that philosophers take for an ontological entity. All metaphysical questions emerge through category errors. As he puts it, "The characteristic of a metaphysical question [is] that we express an unclarity about the grammar of words in the *form* of a scientific question."[40] The subject appears as a rupture only because we fail to pay attention to the facts of our grammar and attempt to extrapolate from them in illegitimate ways.

Later figures in analytic philosophy sometimes deviate from Wittgenstein's emphasis on the priority of everyday use of language, but they almost always share the suspicion of metaphysical pretensions of rupture that animates his entire career as a thinker. In this way, there is a similarity between analytic thinkers and structuralists, insofar as both seek to reduce events to their linguistic coordinates. For Rudolf Carnap, we can reduce all statements to their logical syntax, and in so doing rupture becomes exposed as an illusion. The subject of metaphysics is nothing but a wrongheaded way of speaking that comes from a failure to understand syntactical rules.[41] Analytic philosophy turns philosophy away from its Platonic and Cartesian history in an attempt to break from the illusions of idealism. In the process, it plays a part in the abandonment of rupture.

The vitalism of Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze foregrounds its rejection of rupture. There is only life, and the apparent breaks from life remain wholly within it, which is why both Bergson and Deleuze vigorously reject any introduction of negativity into their thought. Bergson's subject is free because it is not really a subject. It exists within the flux of time, and rather than constituting its freedom through withdrawing from the exigencies of time, this vitalist subject has the same freedom that time itself has. Just as every moment of time is new, every moment fashions a new subject.[42] The vitalist subject is identical with its temporality and cannot break from it. In the guise of granting the subject the ultimate freedom, Bergson condemns it to the prison of incessant change without the possibility of an authentic rupture.[43]

Deleuze is the great philosophical inheritor of Bergson and the foremost exponent of vitalism in the latter half of the twentieth century. While he shares Bergson's identification of the subject with its temporality (manifested most directly in the second of Deleuze's *Cinema* books), it is the thoroughgoing rejection of evil that marks Deleuze's most dramatic attempt to eliminate rupture.[44] Relative to its world and even to itself, the subject of metaphysics is evil: it has the capacity to turn against what the world postulates as good and against its own good.[45] For Deleuze, however, this is impossible. Evil remains exterior to the subject. As he notes in *Expressionism in Philosophy* (a book on Spinoza), "We are never determined to do evil; we are determined to seek what is good for us in our encounters, in the circumstances in which those encounters take place."[46] Subjects can encounter evil, but they can only experience it, like death, in the form of an encounter with exteriority. Without any negativity of its own, the vitalist subject that Deleuze posits has no capacity for rupture. In order for the subject to be a subject, it must be evil, even if it can ultimately opt for the good.

Of all the philosophies that dominated the twentieth century, Marxism seems the most inextricably tied to rupture. It is difficult to imagine a Marxism in which revolutionary rupture is not the central concern. But the two primary strains of Marxist thought in the middle of the twentieth century—Stalinism in the Soviet Union and the Frankfurt School in the West—reduced the emphasis on a revolutionary break. Stalinist Marxism translates dialectic into a natural principle and thereby conceives revolution as natural change. As Marxism expanded its philosophical reach under Stalinism, it lost its fundamental philosophical anchoring in rupture (which is why Stalinism could accommodate itself to "socialism in one country").

The Frankfurt School, for its part, abandoned the possibility of revolution and committed itself to critique. Marxism's critique of capitalism became more generalized with the Frankfurt School as a critique of instrumental reason. The master text of the Frankfurt School, *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* doesn't target so much capitalism as it does the dominance of Enlightenment-style thinking, as the book's title suggests. This thinking extends as far back as Odysseus, who, according to Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, "is the prototype of the bourgeois individual."[47] While one can imagine overthrowing capitalism with a revolutionary gesture, the same cannot be said for instrumental reason, which is so widespread as to be unassailable. One critiques domination that it is impossible to escape or to interrupt.[48] Only in the raw materials of art—for example, the colors of a painting or the light that enables us to perceive them—can we find a measure of resistance to the all-pervasive quantificational methods and meanings of instrumental reason. "No light," Adorno writes, "falls on men and things without reflecting transcendence. Indelible from the resistance to the fungible world of barter is the resistance of the eye that does not want the colors of the world to fade."[49] There is a poignant if almost desperate quality to this resistance, and the wholesale change capable of being animated by this kind of resistance seems promissory at best. No rupture would ever be authentic enough for Adorno's tastes: every form of authenticity from the perspective of Adorno and the Frankfurt School is finally just a jargon.[50]

The philosophical turn away from rupture in the twentieth century is almost total. Only some strains of psychoanalysis, feminism, existentialism, and anticolonialism hold on to the idea. Even within psychoanalysis, however, the prevalence of developmental models of the psyche that lead to a healthy subject represent an abandonment of rupture equal to that by phenomenology or structuralism. Midcentury psychoanalysis set its sights primarily on adaptation rather than interruption. Jacques Lacan's

return to Freud is nothing but an attempt to restore rupture to a central place in psychoanalytic thought and practice. Lacan's attempt to keep the idea of rupture alive places him in the company of figures such as Rosa Luxemburg, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Frantz Fanon. But rupture gains its most elaborate theoretical development in the twentieth century through the philosophy of two thinkers forced to flee Nazism—Walter Benjamin and Hannah Arendt. Though Benjamin emerged from the Marxist tradition and Arendt out of the phenomenological one, both diverted these streams of thought in the direction of rupture in order to create a different approach to history.

Interruptions in a Continuous Era

Benjamin's primary contribution to the theory of rupture occurs in his posthumous essay "On the Concept of History." Here, he rejects Marxism's investment in progress and in history. The task of the historical materialist becomes not identifying with the proletariat as the eventual victor in the class struggle but rather identifying with all those who have lost throughout history. Marxism's aim must not be a triumph that would affirm the position of the class now anointed by history but an embrace of the failures that progressive history has repressed. Progress, for Benjamin, leads to catastrophe, while the interruption of progress staves off this catastrophe and marks a moment of genuine creation.

Benjamin theorizes revolution not as the fulfillment of a historical mission but as a break within history. This break of historical continuity gives revolution its political significance. In the fifteenth thesis from "On the Concept of History," Benjamin notes, "What characterizes revolutionary classes at their moment of action is the awareness that they are about to make the continuum of history explode. The Great Revolution introduced a new calendar. The initial day of a new calendar presents history in a time-lapse mode."[51] The introduction of a new calendar by the French Revolution functions for Benjamin as an objective correlative of revolutionary rupture. The revolution is a break in the chronological movement of history and time, which is why it was entirely appropriate that revolutionaries might shoot at the faces of public clocks, as Benjamin chronicles later in this thesis.

The creative power of revolution stems from its interruption of the progressive flow of history. As Benjamin sees it, the revolutionary cannot be a progressive, and those invested in progress have no way to establish values for which they might fight. This leaves progressivism impotent

when confronted with the rise of fascism, in Benjamin's era or any other. But by disrupting the continuity of history and progress, one can expose fascism's absence of any solid grounding while carving out the political values with which one can arm oneself against it. Revolution doesn't simply create a new political arrangement; it also gives us the means with which we might defeat the forces that seek to root our being in blood and soil and thereby naturalize inequality and unfreedom.

Though "On the Concept of History" is among Benjamin's final works (if not the last one), he anticipates the insights concerning rupture that he develops there in an early essay. "Critique of Violence" begins with an insight into how violence serves the struggle against rupture. Benjamin identifies two predominant forms of violence—law-creating violence and law-sustaining violence—and both, despite the transformative nature of the former, work against rupture. Law-creating violence establishes the authority of the law for a social order, and law-sustaining violence, most often in the form of the police, maintains the stability of law and the order that it underwrites. The disruptive sense of violence disappears beneath its role in the creation and maintenance of order.

But Benjamin does not end with just these two options. He envisions another form of violence that he labels divine. Divine violence breaks the relationship between violence and law by interrupting the authority of the law and by separating the subject from its biological life. Whereas both law-creating and law-sustaining violence rely on their power over the living body, divine violence has nothing to do with the body. Just as revolution in "On the Concept of History" interrupts the order of history, divine violence in "Critique of Violence" interrupts the order of nature. In this sense, it is, as Benjamin says, "lethal without spilling blood."[52] Through the concept of divine violence, Benjamin redeems violence by completely changing its valence. Violence ceases to concern life and forges a world in which values beyond life hold sway.

Though Hannah Arendt has a much less sanguine view of the prospects for violence than Benjamin, it is easy to see why he was the only associate of the Frankfurt School whom she befriended.[53] Fleeing Nazism in Germany during the 1930s, she met Benjamin in Paris and saw in him a fellow traveler. They were not simply both exiled German Jews, but they also shared a philosophical investment in rupture that was unique among the philosophers of their era.[54] While Benjamin arrives at rupture by marrying Marxism with theology, Arendt's path is much more difficult to track. She begins as a student of Heidegger's and Karl Jaspers's, but she never fully invests herself in Heidegger's phenomenology. Arendt's thoroughgoing immersion in the history of philosophy and in political history

grants her an insight into rupture and simultaneously allows her to avoid becoming simply a follower of Heidegger. For Arendt, the political realm exists only on the basis of a break from the realm of necessity. This has the status, as she sees it, of a groundbreaking philosophical insight.

The ancient Greeks constructed a political realm entirely separate from the household, which was the site where necessity ruled. Politics forms here through the break from the reproduction of mere life, a reproduction incapable of generating any value. In *The Human Condition,* Arendt identifies the political importance of this separation and critiques the contemporary infiltration into the political realm by the forces of necessity. Arendt argues that we have all become laboring beings—beings interested only in the reproduction of our conditions of possibility—and have thus become incapable of political action. The rupture between the realm of necessity and the political realm has disappeared, and Arendt aims to restore it.

But Arendt's most elaborate theorization of rupture occurs in two works both written in the early 1960s—*Between Past and Future* (1961) and *On Revolution* (1963). Here, she contends that we act outside time and space within a point of rupture that she identifies with the present. She writes, "This small non-time-space in the very heart of time, unlike the world and the culture into which we are born, can only be indicated, but cannot be inherited and handed down from the past; each new generation, indeed every new human being as he inserts himself between an infinite past and infinite future, must discover and ploddingly pave it anew."[55] The subject is a break within time, and because of this break, the subject has the capacity to form values that make life worth living. Our natality has such importance for Arendt insofar as it testifies to a moment when something unprecedented occurs. Human birth is never reducible to the reproduction of the species but instead occasions the emergence of a possible disruption in that reproductive continuity.[56]

In *On Revolution,* Arendt reveals her deep kinship with Benjamin as she grasps the importance of revolution in the values that its rupture produces. As with Benjamin's image of revolutionaries shooting at clocks, Arendt celebrates the break in chronology that revolution accomplishes. She says, "For a moment, the moment of beginning, it is as though the beginner had abolished the sequence of temporality, or as though the actors were thrown out of the temporal order and its continuity."[57] Revolution provides a new beginning, and only a new beginning can save us from the authority of nature, history, and tradition. Her seemingly iconoclastic preference for the American Revolution relative to the French Revolution makes sense when understood in these terms. The American Revolution

produces a political order that remains somewhat committed to the revolutionary rupture, whereas the French Revolution leads to counterrevolutionary violence that represses the revolutionary break. The American Revolution doesn't go far enough in its attempt to sustain the rupture, but it does go further than any other revolution, which is why Arendt celebrates it even as she laments the abeyance of politics in contemporary America.

Though they are not alone, Arendt and Benjamin stand out as twentieth-century partisans of rupture. Their status as refugees in life mirrors their philosophical status, in which they think against the grain of all the dominant strains of thought. They pave the way for thinkers like Badiou, Agamben, and Žižek. All three acknowledge the importance of Benjamin for their thought, but it is only Agamben who identifies Arendt as one of his precursors. Nonetheless, her commitment to rupture in an age that fled from it attests to her philosophical importance.

The widespread turn away from rupture in thought seems to have an inverse relation to the political history of the twentieth century, though this history is somewhat misleading.[58] The Russian Revolution of 1917 was certainly a political rupture in its initial manifestation, but many of the other cases of political revolution in the twentieth century represent avoidances of rupture equal to those that took place in the realm of thought. The partisans of rupture in twentieth-century politics were almost as rare as those in twentieth-century philosophy.

A Disjunctive History

The signifying rupture—the emergence of language—embodies the values that define political struggle. All the values that subjects struggle for can be found in germ form in the break from the natural world that signification inaugurates. But needless to say, these values were not recognized with the advent of the signifier. Political history is marked by the moments when thinkers recognized the values inherent in the signifying rupture and brought them to the fore of politics. In the chapters that follow, we identify seven values that derive from rupture, and we trace their moment of philosophical or political recognition. Obviously, there are more than seven political values, and one could easily add to them. But for us, these are the values that are fundamental for political struggle today and that have had the greatest impact on the history of political struggle. These values are belief, universality, solidarity, equality, freedom, singularity, and the inhuman. Belief in the monotheistic God was the first

value to be recognized, and the inhumanity of the human—its excessive protuberance from the natural world—was the most recent.

Our account of these recognitions of rupture will be confined to the history of the West. This is not, of course, because rupture occurs only in the West or because values emerge only there. This is simply the terrain on which we think and exist, but we nonetheless insist on the universality of the theory of rupture. One might speak of the Buddhist or the Taoist rupture and identify the values that become recognizable through these ruptures. In fact, despite Western Buddhism's emphasis on attaining a sense of wholeness, the rupture indicated at the beginning of the classic Buddhist scripture *Dhammapada* is perhaps even more radical than any in Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. It begins, "All experience is preceded by mind, / Led by mind, / Made by mind."[59] Rather than conceiving a continuity of experience, Buddhism posits a break inaugurated by mind that enables us to free ourselves from our passions.

Taoism envisions a similar break. Laozi's *Daodejing* clearly advocates attaining oneness with the Tao, but one can do so only through a violent rupture with everyday life. The Tao master no longer desires in the way that others desire. As Laozi puts it, "He has nothing, / and thus has nothing to lose. / What he desires is non-desire; / what he learns is to unlearn."[60] The values that Laozi enumerates in the *Daodejing* have their origin in the turn away from and rejection of the societal givens that he encourages. Thus, one might take as the starting point for a theory of rupture the history of the East, beginning with the origins of Buddhism and Taoism, but this is a task for another book. Here, we will confine ourselves to the Western tradition, but since we focus on the moments where it breaks from itself and explodes from its confines, the theory transcends its original site.

Our explanation of rupture will not only confine itself to the West; it will also rely on examples that might appear far afield from the world of politics. Though we will have recourse to events such as the Haitian Revolution, we will also discuss cultural works from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to Todd Field's film *Little Children* (2006). The point is not that politics can be reduced to culture—that the cultural terrain is the real political terrain—but that cultural works can provide an unparalleled insight into how the politics of rupture plays itself out. Each chapter begins with a theoretical discussion of a specific political value, but then it turns to culture in order to make clear the connection between rupture and the emergence of the political value. Finally, the chapters conclude with a turn to concrete political action in which the various values have manifested themselves. We begin with the connection between rupture and belief.

The erection of a divinity appears to a modern sensibility to mark a political regression rather than the emergence of a genuine political value. This is the thesis of Ludwig Feuerbach, who in *The Essence of Christianity* describes God as an alienating projection of human power.[61] Humans attribute what is best about themselves to a divinity and thereby fail to realize their own political possibilities. Though this judgment seems to coincide with a secular world, it represents a failure to register exactly what Judaism created when it posited its specific version of God. This God is not simply the projection of human possibility but of human impossibility. That is, God is an attempt to discover what is missing in the structure of human society.

The Jewish God is the articulation of a beyond. In chapter 1, we contend that God marks a point of absence within the signifying chain, and this absence makes transcendence possible. The existence of God means that subjects do not live in a completed world that confines them to a particular place. In this sense, monotheism's act of positing the existence of God is the first revolutionary act. It frees believers from the complete dominance of secular hierarchy and allows them to remain faithful to an absent authority whose commands do not fit within the secular world. Though God can also become a source of servitude, it is initially a hole in the secular kingdom.

Judaism identifies God with rupture by locating God at the point where signification stumbles. God's name cannot be written because it breaks from the order of signification and marks the limit of that order. Though there were earlier divinities, these remained at the level of the signifier. It was the Judaic divinity who was the first to be located in what cannot be said rather than what could. The construction of a positive religious system hides the identification of God with the rupture, but this identification remains, albeit in a hidden form. We might see the circumcision of Jewish boys as the repetition of this identification carried out on the body—the literal enactment of the linguistic cut (God speaking to Abraham) that enables a human being to transcend his immediate lifeworld and become the member of a community of Jews. When an increasing number of Jews today see circumcision as the cruel and unnecessary vestige of an ancient, barbaric culture, when some even explore reversing their circumcisions, and when modern medicine is called on to say that there are no healthy reasons for performing them, we can begin to see how dulled the revolutionary kernel of the Jewish God is becoming.[62]

The initial identification of universality with rupture, accomplished by Plato, succumbs to the same obfuscation. Universality emerges with Plato's distinction between appearance and the ideal forms. As Plato sees

it, universality resides in the beyond, in the ideal form, and not in the cut that distinguishes this form from its appearance. Just as for Judaism God becomes the name for a transcendent order beyond signification, for Plato universality rests on the existence of ideal forms, not on the break between appearance and the ideal it suggests.[63]

There are universals, Plato recognizes, because appearances always suggest another realm beyond that of appearance. If disparate appearances were all that there were, we could have no concept of appearance. It is appearance itself whose self-division leads Plato to see the universality that unites various phenomena. Without this rupture within appearance itself, we would deal only with particular beings. Universality emerges through the turn to the ideal beyond that the structure of the world of appearance necessitates. Chapter 2 shows that Plato recognizes universality as a value because he pays attention to the cut in being.

In chapter 3 we show how this cut leads to the discovery of a related value with the rise of Christianity. Christianity lifts religious belief out of its attachment to a particular group of people and envisions solidarity existing across any social or political distinctions. Christian solidarity—and solidarity as such—exists outside any legal order and interrupts this order. The death and resurrection of Christ interrupts the dominance of law and creates solidarity in this interruption. While law requires a division between inside and outside, citizen and foreigner, or law follower and criminal, Christ reveals these divisions as inconsequential and creates a bond among believers that is indifferent to the law's demand for division.[64]

The Christian community of believers can be a group like any other held together through exclusion and aggression. But Christianity also recognizes a new form of solidarity that does not require an enemy. As long as the bond is constituted through Christ's break with the domain of the law, Christian solidarity remains this latter form, and this constitutes the originality of the Christian break. The solidarity found in rupture does not offer the security of a positive identity for the group, but it does facilitate the transcendence of the legal order.

Christianity dominated politically and philosophically during the end of the Roman Empire and throughout the Middle Ages by abandoning its connection to Christ's rupture with the law. Rather than sustaining an interruption in the law's predominance, it became a law unto itself.[65] Scholastic Christianity established a clear hierarchy that left no space for a solidarity of believers. Modern philosophy's rupture with this hierarchical structure, however, brought with it the recognition of a fundamental equality among all subjects, regardless of their social or intellectual status.

Descartes's decision to make the thinking subject his philosophical starting point breaks with the theological approach of the scholastic tradition. Even if he returns to God, this starting point itself represents a genuine rupture. As we make clear in chapter 4, in this rupture Descartes discovers the equality of all thinking subjects, which he associates with the break from place. The subject has no roots in the world or location in a cosmic hierarchy. The capacity for putting one's entire world and identity into question exists equally for all. The rise of the political value of equality in modernity finds its first expression in an equal capacity to doubt.

Chapter 5 details how modernity also heralds the subject's freedom, though the philosophical recognition of it comes after Descartes's recognition of equality. Descartes does not emphasize the subject's freedom, and Spinoza's notion of freedom requires the elimination of the subject. There is freedom in Spinoza's system, but there is no one to be free. This is why the claim, though terribly poignant, by a member of the brutalized and defeated Green Movement in Iran that "we need a Spinoza in Iran" is not quite right. For Spinoza, freedom is just acceding to necessity, and one becomes free when one realizes that "all things follow from the necessity of the divine nature and happen in accordance with the eternal laws and rules of Nature."[66] It falls to Immanuel Kant to theorize the subject's freedom, and he does so through an explanation of how the subject gives the law to itself. Law, for Kant, becomes the source of freedom because it rips the subject out of its enslavement to external forces.

While Christianity introduces solidarity by untying subjects from their relation to law, Kant identifies the subject's freedom through the reintroduction of law. But Kant's moral law is not a law imposed from the outside. By imposing the moral law on itself, the subject wrestles freedom out of all externally imposed necessity. Spinoza locates freedom in the joyful submission to this necessity, but Kant views the moral law as its free interruption. Necessity governs the world, but not the kingdom of ends that the subject constitutes through its adoption of the moral law. According to Kant, the subject does not have to follow its inclinations: the moral law provides the freedom of an alternative. But this freedom depends on the subject's renunciation of its anchoring in its given situation.

Just as Kant recognizes freedom through the law, Søren Kierkegaard recognizes the subject's singularity through religious faith. The relationship with God, for Kierkegaard, announces the subject's singularity and separates the subject from all others. One is alone before the infinite. Every speaking being must live out the singularity of its subjectivity in the way that it comports itself relative to the infinite. Kierkegaard sees the various

ways that subjects try to avoid their singularity—turning to amusements, joining the crowd, even adhering to a strict ethical system—but finally this singularity is what returns. No one can live out the relation to the infinite for another. In the move from Hegel to Kierkegaard, singularity changes from being the unsurpassable stumbling block of sense to being a viewpoint on this failure of sense.

As chapter 6 indicates, the singularity of the subject emerges from the failure of every social or philosophical system to achieve completion. Singularity is not the state of being itself prior to any mediation but the result of mediation's failure to account for the subject. Even the system that has a place for everything cannot have a place for the being that is constitutively out of place. As Kierkegaard's great philosophical opponent Hegel shows, the absolute can indicate only the failure of a system to be complete, not its successful completion. Modern philosophy recognizes singularity as a value when Kierkegaard shifts its emphasis to this point of failure and regards everything from this perspective.

Though Kierkegaard sees that the singular subject doesn't fit within any system, he doesn't yet grasp the extent of the subject's self-destructiveness. The great recognition of Sigmund Freud is not the provenance of sexuality or the ubiquity of the unconscious; it is the concept of the death drive, an idea so radical in its implications that Freud himself could not fully theorize it. For Freud, the human is not simply another animal governed by instinct, nor is it a cultural being constructed by the demands of society. The human is a being driven to sabotage itself and to repeat the initial loss that constitutes it as a subject. The drive that subtends this repetition—the death drive—separates the human from its animality. This discovery of the human as the self-sabotaging animal or as the inhuman being is the subject of chapter 7.

The inhuman emerges as a recognized value through Freud's discovery of its dislocatedness in the animal world. Humans are maladapted animals, deformed by the signifier and no longer capable of fulfilling their needs without sustaining the self-destructiveness of their drive. Humanity has a value not because of its dignity but because of the sublimity of its failure. It is the being for which failure counts as the only possible success. For the human, the repetition of the drive provides suffering, but it is also the source of the subject's enjoyment. The human is a being for whom enjoyment is inseparable from suffering. Rather than being the master of the animal kingdom, it is a misfit there. There is humanity only through this inhumanity, through this break from animality.

The history of the discovery of these political values has not led in each case to adherence to them. Often even the thinker who recognizes a

certain value in rupture misidentifies the source of the value and retreats from it. Though many political struggles champion belief, universality, solidarity, equality, freedom, singularity, and humanity, they do not always connect these values with the rupture that creates them. It is our contention that one can sustain a value only by sustaining the rupture from which the value emerges. Freedom, for instance, must remain a freedom that violently tears the subject from its external determinants, and equality must constantly uproot the subject from its place in the social order. To champion a value, one must also champion the interruption within being that makes the value possible. No one is naturally free, and no one is equal while retaining a proper place. Value requires an embrace of the trauma of the rupture.

The difficulty of a politics of rupture is that, in contrast to the situation or the symbolic structure, rupture is often fleeting. Ruptures interrupt the situation, confronting us with the specter of discontinuity. This is why the interval created by rupture is so significant. We know we are in the presence of rupture's interval when the continuous order of things is interrupted, when things are all of the sudden truly up for grabs, when the very emergence of value appears in a new and nonsensical way—in a way whose coordinates cannot be taken from the situation being interrupted by rupture. When a movement fails to introduce or sustain the division in being that it is in the power of rupture to highlight, the result is a political phenomenon that does not really unsettle anything. Given the predominance of these failures in the twentieth century, it is understandable why so much of political theory would be leery of rupture, why so much of theory advises incremental, carefully calculated adjustments designed to bolster our extant liberal-democratic order, or can see revolutionary opposition only as always falling prey to the oppressive regime being opposed.[67] We believe, however, that the task of political theory today is to grant rupture its interval, to let rupture interrupt or perforate being.

Historical and artistic examples of rupture take place during a circumscribed time, and then a new symbolic structure forms in their aftermath. Though it may (and most often does) display a significant departure from the former one, the new symbolic structure necessarily represses the event that founds it. But what if politics sustained its tie to rupture? What if our very concept of politics refused to squelch the moment of rupture in which politics is not yet a matter of what is being signified—the content of signification? As Fabio Vighi puts it, "What should not be neglected, then, is the attempt to theorize a strategic intervention in our social constellation that lives up to the sublimity of the act. Although the former will always be hampered by its original debt to the dominant ideological order, it will

also inherit from that order its excess, or inconsistency, which it needs to exploit."[68] The theory of rupture is the attempt to answer Vighi's call, to construct a theory that remains within the disruptiveness of the act and the excess of the ideological order that results from it.

It is our contention that value derives from rupture as such rather than from certain types of ruptures. That is to say, we refuse to differentiate qualitatively between the various forms that rupture takes. There is no such thing as a conservative rupture because conservatism, by definition, seeks to sustain identities and stabilize values. Rupture, in whatever form it takes, does not permit the sense of security—either psychic or physical—that conservatism demands. Conservatism lies in the retreat from rupture, not in its specific form. The fear of a fascist or totalitarian version of rupture is unfounded and represents a hidden fear of rupture as such and of the prospect of remaining within it. The difficulty of remaining in the rupture and sustaining the values that it creates stems from the trauma associated with it.

The rupture is always a traumatic cut. Though the rupture gives birth to political values like freedom and equality, it does so through disconnecting individuals from the bonds of tradition through which they receive a sense of identity and belonging. To remain within the rupture is to exist without the security of a place in the world. One is traumatically cut adrift, and even the solidarity one experiences with other subjects does not provide the assurance of a collective identity. It is a solidarity of isolated and singular subjects who have no home with which to identify or to strive for. We find value only through the embrace of trauma. The values worth fighting for are the ones that would also destroy us.

Perhaps it is impossible to remain wholly within the rupture. Despite its value, the trauma of it may be unsustainable. But what is not impossible is making the traumatic rupture the organizing principle of the political order that we constitute. Rather than trying to create a political order to function as a rampart against trauma, we can build a recognition of the centrality of rupture into the political order itself. This recognition requires at every point highlighting the connection between the political value at stake and its genesis in the traumatic rupture: we believe because God is absent; we can access universality because being is divided; we are in solidarity because we have no group of our own; we are equal because we have no proper place; we are free because we have given ourselves the law; we are singular because our system is incomplete; and we are human because we have been ripped out of our animality. When we lose the connection with the traumatic rupture, we lose whatever value we are fighting for.

Chapter One

Belief

Prior to the events of September 11, 2001, and the rise of a visibly militant, Islamic fundamentalism, debates regarding the relationship of God and religion to politics contained positions that by and large disagreed only on the role of religion in a democratic society. Even as some liberals joined the call for a return to religion—it was Al Gore who, in 1999, rejected what he called the false choice of "hollow secularism and right-wing religion"[1]—the fundamental liberal view of religion remained unchanged. For liberals, religious teachings and faith may have a central role to play in a democratic society, but this role involves not so much the doctrinal foundation of this or that social value or policy as it does the salutary symbolism of religion's free and freely tolerated expression. To secure this free expression, liberalism famously refuses to privilege any single religion. The very honor of a democracy, as James Madison once argued, rests on religion remaining "perfectly free and unshackled," entirely outside the jurisdiction of government.[2] For someone like Madison, to privilege one religion is tantamount to an act of tyranny—the very antithesis of democracy. In a sense, religion supports the practice of liberal-democratic governance not by participating in or legitimizing it directly but by asking to be left more or less alone. This is why, when liberal political candidates are asked to speak to the animating link between their religious faith and their political policies or decisions, they do so in ways that often show signs of discomfort, of having to display something they do not wear on their sleeve.

In an interview, Tony Judt lamented this discomfort, insisting that the Left redress its absent ethical vocabulary by deploying the language of religious morality in political and social policy debates. According to Judt, there is "no reason or principle why religion and what I think of as a sort of socially responsible state should be remotely incompatible."[3] The problem with the Left, for Judt, is that it minimizes the importance of the moral frameworks in and through which human beings make sense of

political affairs. In his *Ill Fares the Land,* he writes, "Debates about war, abortion, euthanasia, torture; disputes over public expenditure on health and education: these and so much else are instinctively couched in terms that draw quite directly on traditional religious or philosophical writings."[4] Rather than "mock the bland ethical nostrums of religious leaders," Judt wants liberals to understand that "humans need a language in which to express their moral instincts."[5] When it comes to political decisions, he argues, we need a "moral narrative" that "ascribes purpose to our actions in a way that transcends them," that gives us "reasons to choose one policy or set of policies over another."[6] This position has a pragmatic dimension: it responds to the monopoly that conservatives have had on appeals to religiosity, a monopoly that brings with it an incredible political advantage, at least in the United States.

In the very genealogy of liberalism, however, the iteration of transcendent, moral reasons for belief is a vexed one. It was Immanuel Kant who articulated the Enlightenment ideal by formulating the axiom that the moral law cannot be an object of representation, that we cannot know the specific actions God sees as good. According to Kant, the moral law ought not to involve any direct specification of the good, since the good can never be an object of impartial knowledge. We might think that the good can be tied directly to a Supreme Being and a set of duties or statutory commands it prescribes—for example, the Ten Commandments or the injunction to love one's neighbor. But for Kant, things are not all that simple. Summarizing Kant's insight, Alenka Zupančič writes, "Once the good comes on stage, the question necessarily arises: *Whose good?*"[7] What served as an unambiguous value for someone like Aristotle becomes questionable with Kant.

To prevent this question's emergence, Kant cuts the cord between religion and a positive set of specific, statutory duties commanded by creed, attempting to bring an end to what he referred to as reason's "state of nature," wherein reason "cannot validate or secure its assertions and claims except through *war.*" The Enlightenment credentials of the first *Critique* rest precisely in its effort to replace this sectarian state of nature with what Kant called "the peace of a state of law."[8] Law here functions in a way that psychoanalysis would make plain: to halt the (spuriously moral dimension of the) instincts. This is, for Kant, the fundamental virtue of the critique executed by pure or speculative reason—reason turned in on itself and on its own capacities. When so turned, reason ends up neutering the instinct-abetting metaphysical and theocratic truth claims of religion by forcing all such claims to play by the logical rules of how anything

is known at all. For Kant, the only transcendental idea that we know is freedom: we know this idea, Kant says, without having any insight into it. The result is the emergence of civil-secular society proper—a society of citizens who behave in accordance with the laws and ethical values they create. There is a transcendental idea of freedom but no positive transcendent content.

To read the first *Critique* is to understand, in the end, how sectarian conflict has its coordinates in philosophical problems of knowledge and how no war can be said to be holy. Ruling out on logical and ethical grounds the establishment of any one, empirical, transcendent God or object of religious belief, Kant seeks to discover a moral maxim that would be as inclusive or universal as possible. The categorical imperative of the second *Critique* is what he comes up with. Thomas Jefferson's authorship of his "Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom"—the document that became the basis for the famous Establishment Clause in the U.S. Constitution—belongs for this reason to the same historical moment in which Kant wrote. The bulwark of political liberalism, the Establishment Clause links the establishment of religious freedom to the definitive nonestablishment of religion. In this way, a more universal and inclusive civil law takes the place of denominational, ecclesiastical law as the superintendent of modern social relations.

This is why legislation urging the display of the Ten Commandments in public schools across the United States—as an antidote to school violence and moral crisis—finds little to no support among liberals, why federal courts have repeatedly forbidden reference to a deity at public school events like graduations or sporting contests,[9] and why the National Day of Prayer in the United States was recently declared unconstitutional.

For the orthodox or evangelical believer, the liberal-democratic position represents already a demotion of God to suit relativistic moral and political ends. From their viewpoint, a kind of hubris and historical amnesia informs liberalism's refusal of the divinely guided founding of a democratic society overseen by the goodness of God. As conservatives never tire of pointing out, the so-called wall between church and state was a phrase invoked by Jefferson in a private communiqué more than a decade after the signing of the Constitution. And to believe that human beings are the best arbiters of human morality, capable of arriving rationally at the social and political values best suited to a just and moral society is for conservatives an untenable proposition, one that flies in the face of the lessons of history and that takes from us any basis on which to deem a social value or political policy immoral.

If we are not simply to let anything go, if we are to arrest a societal decline into decadence or barbarism, there must be a source of moral intelligibility outside the social order that we can access, something eternal or immutable whose commandments and justice guarantee the integrity of moral behavior. How else to explain, as C. S. Lewis once argued, that we believe one set of moral ideas to be better than another? As Lewis writes, "If no set of moral ideas were truer or better than any other, there would be no sense in preferring civilised morality to savage morality, or Christian morality to Nazi morality. . . . If your moral ideas can be truer, and those of the Nazis less true, there must be something—some Real Morality—for them to be true about."[10] The current version of Lewis's idea here gets voiced most frequently in the religious endorsement of heterosexual marriage: if heterosexual marriage is not morally superior to same-sex marriage, then why not permit polygamous, incestuous, or bestial marriages? So from the standpoint of traditional morality and traditional social relations, God's moral law—authenticated in and through his word and his prophets—can be (contra Kant and political liberalism) fundamentally known, and it exists at and as the foundation of a flourishing society. This is why conservative politicians have no problem talking about their religious faith, and why some might even explain a given position or decision by invoking the voice and desire of God. Who can forget, in this regard, George W. Bush's infamous comment: "I trust God speaks through me. Without that, how could I do my job?"[11] It is impossible to imagine a liberal expressing a similar sentiment.

After the religiously motivated violence of September 11, however, a new and powerful constellation of voices emerged that sought to eclipse altogether the liberal-conservative impasse we have just described. Indeed, as liberals plead for and do everything they can to protect a civil society in which a plurality of religions can flourish,[12] and as the orthodox intensify their call that theirs is the one true religion, atheists have mounted a wholesale attack on the corrosive nature of religious belief in toto—how, to cite the subtitle of Christopher Hitchens's book, it poisons everything. Thus while liberals go to great lengths to insist that Islam is a religion of peace, and while evangelical Christians claim that it is a false religion, scientists and philosophers like Victor Stenger, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, Michel Onfray, and Richard Dawkins argue for the wholesale elimination of religion, claiming that atheism is the only attitude vis-à-vis religion worthy of modernity.[13] From the standpoint of an evolutionary biologist like Dawkins, religion may once have been adaptive; now, however, it is destructive, a barrier to our understanding of the world in scientific terms and to the emancipative potential of such understanding. As Dawkins shows from the perspective of evolutionary biology and as Stenger shows from the perspective of physics, the probability that there is a God and that there is an afterlife is almost zero. Given these odds, religious belief can appear only as an outdated evolutionary mechanism without any productive reason for existing.

In a certain sense, the new atheists are not new at all. Proclamations about the falsity and nefariousness of religious belief have a long history. From Marx's famous denunciation of religion as an opiate to Bertrand Russell's enumeration of the reasons why he wasn't a Christian, atheism has been a staple of a certain portion of the Left. But what stands out about the new atheism is its attempt to ground the denunciation of belief neither in politics (as Marx did) nor in the structure of the psyche (as Freud did) but in the truths of science. It is no longer "*Dionysus versus the crucified*" but rather Darwin versus the crucified.[14] The point is not just that belief is politically unhealthy or epistemologically suspect but also that there is no place for it in the contemporary world. What we know has rendered religious belief completely untenable.

The scientific assault on belief becomes most convincing in the work of Richard Dawkins. For Dawkins, science has given too much leeway to believers by locating or relegating the question of God's existence to a domain outside scientific inquiry. As he sees it, this is just another scientific question that can have a scientific answer. It is physical rather than metaphysical. As Dawkins notes, "The existence of God is a scientific hypothesis like any other."[15] Because the question of God's existence is a scientific one, we can solve this seemingly intractable problem. In *The God Delusion,* Dawkins gives us the answer: there is almost no probability at all that God exists, and if we want to exist as members of the modern scientific world, we must accede to this fact. In doing so, what we gain significantly outstrips what we lose. This is a view that the other new atheists wholeheartedly share, which is why they write such enthusiastic books.

Like Marx, Nietzsche, or Freud, today's atheists believe in a kind of political progress that awaits a society shorn of God and religious belief. According to this line of thinking, if we can disabuse religious believers of the existence of God and of the truths underlying their belief, then we will have removed a key ideological barrier to Leftist political struggle proper and to a world changed for the better: for Marx, the recognition of economic exploitation and the overthrow of the ruling class; for Nietzsche, a time "when we gather the courage to reconceive our evils as what is best in us";[16] for Freud, the awakening of intellectual and scientific inquiry and the liberation of psychic energies that might make life more tolerable for everyone.

From the vantage point of a politics of rupture, however, the notion that progress today is stymied by the forces of religious belief ought perhaps to give us pause. While it is no doubt the case that fundamentalist religious belief is an implacable foe of modern democratic society, the fact of rupture obliges us not to marginalize or dispense with (the moment of) belief. Indeed, our view is that the key to fighting against the nefarious effects of belief involves promulgating the recognition that it is impossible *not to believe,* that the political moment as such depends necessarily on an act of belief that can in many respects be described as religious.

We deploy the word "religious" here not to give to rupture a denominational hue (and certainly not a Christian one) but rather out of the conviction that political commitments and political activism cannot be explained exclusively in extant political terms, that some kind of extrapolitical vocabulary is called for. To invoke theological terms—in the same way Walter Benjamin invokes the messianic—is thus not an enjoinder to embrace the content of religious belief but instead to open up or make more widely available its form. The form of religious belief, or the form rendered highly visible by religious belief, lets us tap into the source of political energy contained in *the act of or decision to believe* itself. The impossibility of nonbelief—even when it comes to the form of civil society characteristic of secular modernity—must today function as a rallying point of the political.

God and the Missing Signifier

What do we mean by insisting on the impossibility of nonbelief and by suggesting that it become an ethical rallying point? As we have been arguing, the social order emerges as the result of a decisive break—the appearance of a nonsensical signifier (an act, a name, a gesture) that introduces a constitutive rupture into being. To be confronted with this nonsensical master signifier (first theorized by Jacques Lacan) is to enter into a radically new universe of signification. In the encounter with this initial signifier, the subject receives the demand of the social structure. But this demand never acquires a definite sense, and the structure remains incomplete because no binary signifier for the master signifier exists. There is no clear answer to the demand, no explicit indication of how one must comport oneself. The incompletion of the signifying structure is the way in which the initial rupture that forms the structure manifests itself on an everyday level. A break inevitably occurs at the point where sense would become fully realized and produce a completed world of signification. Such completion is impossible and would leave nothing more to be said. The missing binary signifier that marks incompletion bespeaks at the same time the inescapability of rupture.

To say that there is no binary signifier is to say that we can never be certain about what the social order wants from us. The demand to obey always conceals a hidden desire for some type of transgression of this demand. But there is nothing that can reveal this underside of the law to us. The structure's injunction exists on its own, without any subsequent signifier that would provide completion and justification for the master signifier. Any signifier elected to complete and justify the master signifier would itself become the signifier in need of completion and justification, leading to an endless proliferation of signifiers. No additional signifier can come along and bring the initial signifier into the realm of signification.

Any parent who has found him- or herself on this track is soon made to see that his or her demand cannot, to the child's satisfaction, be grounded in an ultimate reason that would allow it to make sense. This is why, at some point, the parent must respond to the child's question, "Why?" with the unsatisfying response, "Because I said so" or "Because it just is." This sort of response is actually present implicitly in each and every attempt of the parent to provide the legitimizing signifier.[17] Only at the end of such exchanges, however, do we see how the ultimate justification for parental (and societal) authority is tautological. In the last instance, the child must obey simply because the parent says so, and this absence of a ground for the parental injunction is typically our first experience of the missing binary signifier that would provide a sense for the senseless master signifier.

The missing binary signifier is also evident in the phenomenon of coolness. Every social order demands that its subjects be cool, which is to say that they fit in with societal norms. Even though the term "cool" is a relatively recent invention, the idea is not. But no one who straightforwardly sets out to abide by the demand to be cool will accomplish this feat. Being cool will prove completely elusive. There is no clear answer to the demand, no direct path to coolness, which is why so many teenagers find their experience of adolescence a horror. This horror is an effect of the absence of the binary signifier that would eliminate the mystery of cool.

Confronted by the master signifier and bereft of the missing binary signifier, the subject faces a kind of choice: it must decide whether or not to believe in the transcendental status of the missing signifier. Even though we act *as if* there could be something of rational sense in this gap that can compel belief, there is not. Belief always involves a decision, not deliberation. In the most celebrated of believers, this moment of decision is sometimes condensed or concealed, such as when Abraham, commanded

by God to sacrifice his son Isaac, sets out to fulfill the order without questioning it, or when Paul, on the road to Damascus, is seized by the truth of Christianity.[18] Nonetheless, for the master signification to become meaningful and to catalyze an action, a subject must for an instant perceive the fundamental absence that subtends (or underlies) it. In the perception of this absence, moreover, the subject experiences a summoning of his/her capacity for belief. Indeed, if the subject is to remain inside a universe of signification (or to inaugurate a new one), then at least one missing signifier, one signifier that signifies the structural incompletion, must be believed in. This signifier wins its truth only via the subject's act of belief.

Belief emerges as a possibility not from a confrontation with existential anxiety or social insecurity but from a structural exigency, specifically the exigency of rupture. The rupture that ensures the incompletion or moment of senselessness within every order of sense compels belief, which serves as a way of acknowledging the structural necessity of the rupturing gap. Belief testifies to a hole in the wholeness of one's world, and the avowing of this hole—the act of taking up belief without transforming it into belief in some substantial entity, like a God who can act in the world and provide succor—activates the political possibilities inherent in the world's incompletion. Because our world is incomplete, authority remains an imposture, and belief is always a testament to this imposture. Without rupture, there would be no space in which belief might emerge, no missing signifier in which one might invest oneself. It is through belief that one makes evident the intractability of rupture in every signifying system. But this belief must sustain its relation with absence rather than filling it in with a present figure of authority: only in this way does belief enable the political act that breaks entirely from the domain of authority.

The subject's act of belief, we could say, waives the requirement that the master signifier share the stage with its legitimizing binary signifier: that is to say, the subject's act of belief permits the absence of the binary signifier *to be its own* binary signifier. The act of belief takes place in the opening in the structure of signification created by the absence of a binary signifier. This opening means that belief is constitutively blind, that there is no binary signifier to see.[19] In fact, it is only when a missing signifier is accorded validity via blind belief that the entire universe of signifiers can come to have a meaning at all. This is what makes all the attempts to ground belief in human biology or in this or that historical event, to grant belief a measure of rational causality, so profoundly wrong: these attempts read the effects of a structural act of belief as belief's compelling cause(s), as if conviction were a matter of acting on the basis of empirical,

conviction-securing proofs. Belief never has a basis in proofs but functions most often in the complete absence of them, an absence correlative to belief's constitutive blindness. This is why seemingly airtight arguments against belief almost inevitably have the effect of enhancing it. The attempts to find the foundation of belief obfuscate the political task of our time—to return to, distill, and repeat the inexplicable embrace of the signifier of rupture, or, what is to say the same thing, to believe. Despite all our attempts to find for belief a solid foundation, the moment of belief proper is a moment unavailable to us. We are already believers when we commence setting out to find the reasons why we believe.

The idea that it is impossible not to believe must confront the growing number of professed nonbelievers in the contemporary world, not least of which are the new atheists. One can take them at their word and nonetheless recognize how God persists not as a substantial being who offers personal salvation but as a structural position. Those who do without God necessarily erect a substitute to mark the gap within the structure of signification (its inherent incompleteness). For someone like Marx, this substitute is the law of historical materialism, while for Richard Dawkins it is evolutionary pressure manifested in natural selection. Though neither Marx nor Dawkins believes in God, their thought depends on having one transcendent point that serves as the ultimate reference for all explanations. Their world remains meaningful because they subtract one signifier from all others and invest their belief in it. Without this point of belief, every statement would devolve into senselessness. There would be no way to arrest the constant slippage of signification resulting from the search for an ultimate ground that would make possible a definitive statement. There would be no end to the child's insistent "Why?" directed at the parent.

Though zealous religious belief rises in response to modern secularism, zealotry is not the chief danger today. The problem is rather recognizing belief's predominant form of appearance. As Slavoj Žižek documents at length throughout his work, contemporary belief appears largely in the form of fetishistic disavowal. The fetish enables the subject to believe with deniability, to believe while clinging to the posture of the nonbeliever. Even more than in Marx's time, the ruling fetish is now the commodity (and the free market that facilitates its exchange). Like God, the commodity and the free market provide an ultimate ground of explanation for all phenomena and offer the promise of a final and lasting satisfaction. Everyone knows that the newest commodity will leave them dissatisfied in the end, and that the market depends on a ruthless maximization of self-interested profit, yet they cling to the theological notion that this time

it will be different.[20] Belief in the commodity and the market prevails in large part because it disguises itself as nonbelief, as a cynical, realist attitude. There is no possibility for an atheistic politics to escape the lure of fetishism. The more one denounces belief, the more one succumbs unknowingly to its inevitability. The question isn't belief or nonbelief but the form that belief will take.

To call for a politics within the limits of belief alone, a politics rooted in the absence of a binary signifier, may be for some to make politics the bedfellow of clerical or cultic religion or even totalitarianism. Can politics flourish when it is so explicitly linked to a belief that one undertakes on tautological grounds—because someone else (God or a leader) enjoins us to? How far are we here from Eichmann's 1961 defense in Jerusalem—that he acted in the way that he did because he believed that Hitler's word had the force of law—or the exculpations of others involved in the commission of political violence that they merely obeyed (i.e., believed in) authority? These are clearly significant questions. And yet the critique implicit in them misses a fundamental aspect of the way we have been defining or delineating belief.

Whereas Eichmann and the participants in genocide and the followers of clerical or cultic leaders believe in God or the leader for the way he answers or redresses the fundamental fracture of the social order—the incompleteness of the field of signification—we see belief, in its very structure, as announcing the rupture that subtends every structure and leaves it lacking. The Other in whom we believe is thus never a being whose dictates command obedience. When the authoritative Other summons our belief, we should glimpse in this summons the extent to which this Other's authority is already and primordially compromised. When we believe in this Other we do not get closer to something invariant or pure. We become, instead, more vulnerable.

Absolute Believers

The authoritative Other in the general sense finds arguably its most widespread exemplar in the God of monotheistic religious belief. To be sure, there are authoritative Others in law, in science, in art, and in politics, and the authority of these Others rests likewise on a belief in something always absent, always not there. But religious belief retains a privileged place even in modernity because it organizes itself explicitly around an Other that is constitutively absent. Though other fields have their own forms of belief—scientists believe in their search for truth, legal scholars

believe in the law, and so on—only religious belief avows an absence at the heart of its inquiry. Even if scientists acknowledge that they will never solve every problem, this impossibility is not inscribed into the essence of scientific inquiry, as it is with religion. Religious belief is thus the fundamental form of belief, and belief is the first form or product of rupture.

The God that summons our belief is a God that has, in an exemplary way, invented and enacted its own rupture. We know this must be the case because the God who would be somehow immanently whole would have no need for human beings and their belief. Or, if human belief were already a part of some immanent whole, such belief would be an entirely motor-mechanical affair—like blinking or breathing. This is the problem with Spinoza's conception of God's immanence: he can't explain his own act of theorizing this immanence. The existence of Spinoza himself disproves his conception of God. There must be a hiccup in divine emanation in order to create the space from which a philosopher might recognize this emanation. Recognition of immanent wholeness testifies to a rupture within that wholeness, as Hegel makes clear when he emends Spinoza by theorizing God's self-division.[21]

More than any other philosopher, it is Hegel who uncovers and elucidates the way in which the supreme authority of God is already qualified by his availability to human thinking and belief. For Hegel, there is an inexplicably monstrous process—a necessary act of self-mortification—by which God becomes God. Hegel's seemingly parochial privileging of Christianity stems not from his Christian upbringing but from Christianity's grasp of God's necessary death (in the form of Christ on the cross). God must divide itself in order to separate itself from creation. Only through such an act does God become available to human cognition and belief, and none of the ways in which God is invested with eternal power and Truth can obfuscate this fact.

If we follow Hegel here, we must see how a belief in God is basically a belief in rupture and in the consequent missing signifier that creates the conditions for belief. What Hegel calls the absolute knowledge of religion is the recognition of this fact. Hegel's conception of the absolute is at once the key to his entire thought and the chief obstacle to understanding that thought. The absolute has functioned as the central point of contention from the Young Hegelians to Jacques Derrida. Rather than leaving thought open, the idea of the absolute closes it down. According to the standard critique, Hegel flees to the absolute in order to put an end to the problem of history and even that of time, and this position expresses his profound philosophical arrogance. But if we think of the absolute (as Hegel himself implicitly does) in terms of the missing binary signifier, a

different possibility comes into focus. The absolute signifies the impossibility of doing away with a transcendental moment within signification, the impossibility of nonbelief. We arrive at the absolute not when we know everything but when we recognize that an absent foundation is already included in our search for a foundation. Absolute knowledge comes when we know that some point will always remain missing in our knowledge. The absolute knowledge of religion operates out of this same line of thought.

Absolute knowledge of religion is not the knowledge of the particular shapes and doctrines and worldviews and forms of worship that religion has assumed but rather *that God has taken shape at all.* Though his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* is an elaborate (and at times tedious!) compilation of the successive ways that God has been represented throughout history, Hegel is not fundamentally a historicist. Historicist chronicles of religion's development, for Hegel, "mainly let just the external and apparent side[s] be seen," whereas Hegel wants to give an account of the "formation-process of the representations of God"—that is, the conditions of possibility of their very appearance and the implication of the subject in according these representations a measure of validity or intelligibility.[22] To think the theistic religions absolutely in the spirit of Hegel is thus not to pledge fealty to a Being whose consistency and value are assured; it is, rather, to pledge fealty to a gesture, a name, or an act through which God becomes available for human cognition and belief. Hegel's religiosity marks his fidelity to the moment of rupture.

By focusing on the act through which God becomes available to thought in his philosophy of religion, Hegel enters (perhaps unknowingly) the terrain of politics. This focus on the formal characteristic of God announces simultaneously the unimportance of any divine content. In a single swoop, Hegel condemns fundamentalism of any stripe to a philosophical purgatory. God cannot be both transcendent and fully reducible to understandable signifiers of divine instruction. This is the fundamental contradiction that no fundamentalism can adequately address. If belief is to be genuine, it must be adequate to God's absence, to God's status as the missing signifier or the signifier of the gap within signification. This type of belief doesn't find solace in God's authority but instead recognizes that God's self-division or ceding of authority marks the birth of meaning. Subjects exist in a meaningful world because God cedes his authority (and oneness), which necessitates that subjects themselves get along without appeals to this authority. Our meaningful world depends on God's rupture from God, and it is Hegel who recognizes this self-division.

When we understand God as giving meaning to (our) being in this way—as something that has necessarily sacrificed its content or authority in order even to be thought—we can begin to see the missing signifier as the herald of a heretofore unimaginable social bond. As Badiou would put it, the signifier is included in the social field it inaugurates but does not belong to it. When nonsensical, the signifier of belief is available to everyone: it indexes everything that is indiscernible inside an extant political order of signification. This is the great virtue of the phrase announced in the title of David K. Shipler's *The Working Poor* (2004): such an (ostensibly) crazy, oxymoronic phrase—those who work are not poor; those who are poor do not work hard enough—must be, as it were, believed in to be believed. As *the* proper political gesture, we should be forcing into the field of acceptable political speech acts, over and over again if need be, these very nonsensical signifiers: the working poor, the working poor, the working poor.[23]

Rupture Not Rapture

Though the binary signifier has been missing from the first moment at which language made its appearance, it was the signifying system of Judaism that first grasped the significance of this absence and posited the existence of a divinity in this gap. It was Judaism, in other words, that first made the political connection between rupture and belief. Yahweh is the abyss that no ordinary signifier can close. In order to sustain this abyssal quality of God, Judaism prohibits the entry of God's name into the world of signification. To write God's name would be to render the absent signifier present and to make the world secular. Judaism was the first system to recognize the necessity of an absence that would found the social order through belief in it, and Judaism remains the religion most straightforwardly dedicated to sustaining this absence as an absence. The error of Christianity, from the perspective of Judaism, consists in secularizing the absent signifier, in bringing God down to earth and thereby eviscerating the possibility for real belief.

Ironically, when the great thinker of modern Christianity, Søren Kierkegaard, wants to describe the Christian knight of faith, he turns to a Jewish text. Kierkegaard moves in this direction because he wants to align belief with what necessarily eludes the system of signification, and this is always clearer in Jewish texts than in Christian ones. The system of signification, which Kierkegaard labels the realm of the ethical, presents itself as

a whole, but this wholeness comes to a stopping point beyond which we cannot think. This is where the leap of faith intervenes. In Kierkegaard's formulation, "faith begins precisely where thought stops."[24] Abraham's decision to kill his son Isaac represents a gesture of pure belief, a leap into the abyss of the missing binary signifier. Through this gesture, Abraham demonstrates his conviction that what is missing from the world of signification has a greater hold on him than anything within that world, inclusive of his dearest relation. Though Kierkegaard adduces this example on behalf of an argument for Christianity, it is Jewish through and through.[25] Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac—and the prominence that this story has in the Jewish tradition—makes apparent Judaism's discovery of an absent place in signification. This discovery continues to resonate in paths that Judaism itself has laid down.

Something like the distillation of the divine signifier occurs in the tradition and contemporary commodification of ecstatic Kabbalah. It can have escaped few people's attention that Kabbalah study and Kabbalistic wisdom have in the past decade or so become increasingly fashionable. Each day, it seems, a new celebrity (Jewish or otherwise) identifies him- or herself as an acolyte of Kabbalah, following the path of Madonna, whose 1997 immersion in Jewish mysticism prompted her conversion from Material Girl to Esther (the Jewish name she took on). Salient Kabbalistic texts and commentaries, moreover, are now widely available to the reading public, as are a host of commodities imagined to bear the power of its mystical insights. These include videos and DVDs, bracelets made of red string that are believed to ward off negativity and evil, lines of clothing, and even, alas, a high-energy drink. Centers for the study of Kabbalah now exist in nearly a dozen of the largest American cities, and in major cities in no fewer than thirty countries around the world. And even within distinctly Jewish educational venues, interest and formal study in Kabbalah have spiked considerably.

While it may be tempting to read (and dismiss out of hand) the Kabbalah's current popularity purely as an instance of New Age commodification, the political valence of its study is more complex. We might do well, in other words, to heed Gershom Scholem's poignant claim that "anyone who concerns himself seriously with the thinking of the great Kabbalists will be torn between feelings of admiration and revulsion."[26] Scholem's admiration has its coordinates in the revolutionary energy lent by Jewish mysticism to traditional Jewish texts and practices, and in the way in which Jewish mystics made more opaque or enigmatic the discursive bases for Jewish belief, thus clearing the path for an individual Jewish believer's intimate and revelatory experience of God. Scholem

identifies the elementary procedure of Jewish mysticism as involving the "smelt[ing] down" of sacred texts whose words, as a result, lose their presumed authority. No longer housed in the ossified narratives of the Bible, whose meaning is governed by rabbinic authority, God's word, in the hands of Jewish mystics, becomes more inscrutable and accessible at the same time. As his exchange with Walter Benjamin over the status of revelation in Kafka's work makes plain, for Scholem, the inscrutability of God's word does nothing to impinge on its effectuality. According to Scholem, the "nothingness of revelation" refers to a "state in which revelation appears to be without meaning, in which it still asserts itself, in which it has *validity* but no *significance*. A state in which the wealth of meaning is lost and what is in the process of appearing (for revelation is such a process) still does not disappear, even though it is reduced to the zero point of its own content, so to speak."[27] The moment of revelation in which something asserts itself without asserting a meaning is akin to the (political) moment of belief we have been discussing.

The missing signifier is constitutionally a signifier that appears to us at the zero point of its own content, a point at which its authority appears constitutively compromised. But it is at this very moment, too, that it is most *available*. As Scholem argues, the challenge to rabbinic authority mounted by the Kabbalists constitutes the populist dimension of the Jewish mystical project. But as the history of Western political life attests, populism can slide quickly into experiences of ecstatic (or nativist) election. Populists take apart the meaning of an extant order's governing signifiers but do not linger with the signifier as such and what it portends. If at the time of its rise Kabbalah spoke in part to a crisis being confronted by an exiled Jewish community, today it oversees a primal and formless experience that answers the demand for a much-needed emotional or spiritual component to one's relationship to God and one's engagement in Jewish ritual and practice. As a devotee of Kabbalah in the special September 2005 issue of *Newsweek* given over to spirituality in America put it, "God is real. That's what escaped us in Hebrew school and in the books that we read."[28] This type of statement testifies to why Scholem wants to greet Kabbalists with "revulsion."

To challenge authority in this way—to make revelation so personally accessible and, seemingly, so important implicitly for Jewish belief—is to begin to slide down a slippery slope in which the ecstatic experience of God's presence threatens to undo the social dimension of Judaism altogether, and to countermand the basic prohibitions of Jewish law (including, most notably, the injunction against idolatry). Indeed, the specter of idolatry haunts the Kabbalah industry today, and it lies at the center of the

rationalist critique of Kabbalah advanced most notably by Maimonides (for whom, in *The Guide for the Perplexed,* Kabbalists are labeled foolish persons).[29] Scholem's own work on the heretic Sabbatai Zevi illustrates this point, since it was Zevi's putative communion with God that legitimized his messianic claim and movement—a claim and a movement at loggerheads with rabbinical authority and the revelation of Mount Sinai for having convinced believers that a new, messianic world had already commenced.[30]

While the student of the Kabbalah grasps the importance of what must remain absent, the temptation that haunts this student is that of attributing a substantive content to this absence. In order to remain politicized, belief must retain its connection with rupture. The mistake involves taking the site of rupture for a site of rapture. But this error is not confined to the devotees of the Kabbalah. It manifests itself even in Abraham's decision to sacrifice his son: rather than accepting the contentless form of belief as a final answer, Abraham posits in God a specific command that he is enjoined to obey, not recognizing that real belief deprives the authority of its authority to command. The believer must accept the form of rupture without the content of rapture.

The Disappearance of the Bees

We can see the elision between rupture and rapture in an exemplary way in Myla Goldberg's novel *Bee Season*—a novel whose nine-year-old heroine, Eliza Naumann, seeks communion with God via the exegetical methods of Abraham Abulafia, a thirteenth-century herald of ecstatic Kabbalah. Abulafia's methods involve, as Moshe Idel puts it, the "atomization" of the biblical text—a mystical attentiveness to the (infinitely permutable) letters of the Torah that prepares one for *shefa,* or "the influx of the Divine." On its face, this Kabbalistic concern for language in its materiality has something progressive about it. To attend to language in this way is to tap into what we believe an education in poetry does for its students—that is, lead them to appreciate more the material and beautiful dimension of word and sound and breath, in short, to make them more attentive to the existence and deployment of language outside the instrumental and conventional uses to which it is, for many, exclusively confined. In her Deleuzian-informed exploration of the intimate pleasure and ethical project to be found in meeting with language in this way, Karmen MacKendrick refers to this dynamic as the "word made skin."[31]

Inseparable from this renewed appreciation for the beauty and corporeal dimension of language, *Bee Season* also suggests that Kabbalah

(and its study) might play an integral role in redressing the patriarchal allocation of wisdom and authority in traditional Judaism. As Goldberg no doubt well knows, we have largely the Kabbalah to thank for locating a feminine element or potency or ethic immanent to divinity itself, for insisting on the inscription of sexual difference in God Him/Herself in the form of Shekhinah, or God's "female face." This fact has given Kabbalistic texts a vital role in the construction of a contemporary feminist Jewish theology aimed at rethinking Judaism's understanding of masculinity and femininity, and capable of recovering a maternal ethic of care and source of female power occluded by conceptions of a masculine God.[32]

On this count, the very way Goldberg's novel centers itself on Eliza's philological talents (which come to eclipse entirely her brother's rabbinical proficiencies) has a kind of feminist undertone: not only is sexual difference of no bearing on one's capacity to permute letters and receive revelation, the very attempt to get to an essence of words and letters repudiated by the foundational texts of Judaism seems part and parcel of a feminist critical practice. In her philological efforts, Eliza, we might say, returns texts to their hylic form. Liberating words and even letters from the prison house of patriarchal, signifying systems, Eliza recovers their motility and materiality—their choral or semiotic dimension—in an act of "productive violence" that Julia Kristeva claims is revolutionary. To meet words and letters in this way, to explode the phonetic and lexical and syntactical rules of language use, is for Kristeva to bring back a corporeality foreclosed by patriarchy—those precognitive or preverbal experiences that characterize the way a child interacts with its mother before entering the patriarchal order of language as meaningful communication.[33]

The problem with Kabbalah study diagnosed in *Bee Season,* however, is in the larger fantasy that frames it—the way that getting to the essence of God is imagined to involve blissful access to an ultimate and empowering bearer of meaningful knowledge, a kind of messianic closure. That is to say, *Bee Season* at points fails to sustain the link between belief and rupture (or the hole in signification). On more than one occasion, Eliza imagines her communion with God as solving all the ontological problems that accompany her being in the world. What this means for Eliza is that an encounter with the real of God—the true name of God—cannot seal or make completely meaningful her social identity, since the properly human world depends on at least one signifier's exemption from the symbolic order of meaning. This is another way of saying that in the social world, for Jewish belief and practice to be undertaken *freely,* our relationship to God (and others) must consist, at some level, of a "nonrelation to opacity," to borrow the phrase (coined by Giorgio Agamben) at

the heart of Eric Santner's recovery of Franz Rosenzweig for contemporary Judaism. As Santner makes plain, this "nonrelation" is writ large in Rosenzweig's insistence that there is something in biblical revelation that is beyond all predication, something that makes Jewishness tautological.[34] To follow Santner's reading of Rosenzweig is to see how revelation confronts us not with a transparent bearer of divine meaning but with something unsymbolizable and enigmatic. Conceived in this way, revelation does not so much contain the meaningful reason for belief—or a meaningful motive for practice—as it marks the point that allows us to *choose* to believe and practice.

The moment of belief is linked directly with the singular nature of revelation as it is being defined here. Only when we are confronted with something that does not simply or straightforwardly signify a meaningful message—only then does a kind of freedom to believe (to heed or not such an instance of signification) emerge.[35] Whatever "experience" or "revelation" of God that Eliza may have, then, it is, or should be regarded as, *its own nonsensical event* and not as an encounter with a consistent, omnipotent Other capable of satisfying all one's desires. This is, it seems, what Goldberg has Eliza learn as the novel moves to its climax, as we see Eliza's mystical attempts to commune with God bound up increasingly in an exclusive, asocial, incestuous relationship with her father. And in the novel's final rendering of her communion with God, the complete regression Goldberg shows her undergoing presents us with nothing less than a presymbolic or preoedipal reality *as it really is*. Lying in urine, Eliza's body is a disintegrating jumble of sensations—a proverbial "body without organs" bereft of any hierarchical ordering of the body's drives: her teeth bite her own tongue, sensation threatens entirely to trump language, and there is no way to distinguish between what is animal and what is human. What Goldberg ends up conveying is that the critique of the signifier of revelation must involve not its deconstruction and dismissal but its radical emptying.

When emptied, the revelatory signifier can carry out its structural function as the barrier to wholeness and to meaningful communion and at the same time found an ethics based ineluctably in the exercise of free, human belief. As an empty signifier, the signifier of revelation remains the signifier of rupture and not of rapture. It marks the form of the signifier—its emergence as such—stripped of any content that would obscure this form. Only when the signifier of revelation has been radically emptied—only when there is *no meaningful reason* for our embrace of it—are we genuinely choosing it and all that it subsequently entails. It is, in other words, this free and reasonless choice that conditions and enables

our recognition of flesh-and-blood others—not for the purpose of healing them but rather to live and care for them amid their imperfections.[36] Herein lies the significance of Eliza's final gesture: her intentional (and to her father, incomprehensible) misspelling of the very first word she is given in the very first round of the local elementary school spelling bee.

Eliza is given the word "origami," which she spells as ending with the letter *y*. To read *y* as homograph—as both letter and statement—is thus to foreground an utterance that is, in a sense, *its own revelation*, an utterance that is not itself meaningful but that *conditions* an order of meaning. Here, Goldberg sends us back, as it were, to Scholem's gloss on the radical Kabbalistic claim that in the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, the divine voice uttered only a single letter or sound—the aleph—and that this sound conveyed "no determinate, specific meaning" itself but was rather "the source of all articulate sound" or "the preparation for all audible language."[37] In this view, the "absolute word [of God] is as such meaningless," is "pregnant with infinite meaning, but without specific meaning."[38] The novel's only other explicit reference to *y* comes at a moment where the kiddush cup is seen as incarnating this shape—a sign perhaps that Judaism and Jewish ritual are not ultimately the place to which we go for all the answers but rather for the proper framing of the questions. Foregrounding the letter *y*, Goldberg (and Eliza) finds in Judaism and Jewish mysticism, then, not so much the antidote to imbalance and dissatisfaction and imperfection but rather the way toward a form of (Jewish) togetherness—or *tikkun*—in the face of what necessarily eludes us.

The ending of *Bee Season* returns belief to its origins in rupture, which is why it is a novel pregnant with political undertones. Belief here ceases to provide assurance or completion. It instead testifies to the incompletion that makes political activity possible in the first place. The revelation that the novel embraces is that of a missing signifier that it refuses to render present. This refusal keeps the politics of belief on the terrain of rupture and avoids falling into the trap of the kind of belief that predominates today—belief in a substantial entity that might present itself and cease to be missing, or what we have been calling a belief in rapture.

The Politics of Sanctified Sacrifice

Even in the notion of a sacred sacrifice, we can find ourselves confronted with an act that announces the enigmatic or nonsensical bases of (political) belief. The belief that stems from rupture includes an explicit call for sacrifice. This is, admittedly, to pursue an argument quite out of vogue in

an age in which sanctified sacrifice is synonymous with suicidal violence against civilians. Divinely inspired violence for this reason is treated these days with much suspicion and critical dismissal. In a recent essay aimed at exploring what he calls "the unfinished business that ties together the sacred and the violent," Martin Jay concludes that religion's motivation of moral conduct cannot ever get entirely free of the bloodshed it warrants (and has warranted, historically) in the process.[39] Noting religion's potential both to motivate and to contain violence, Jay wonders whether "religion, understood broadly, [is] part of the problem or part of the solution."[40] He asks, "Can the resources to combat violence come from within religion or do we need to examine other strategies to deal with its threat?"[41] For Jay, one source of the problem lies with the status of the knowledge that animates or sanctions the commission of violence. He speaks, for example, of the "worry that the voices that people hear are more likely to be demonic than godly."[42] Jay's worry here about the sorts of divine inspiration to which a human being might claim to be privy is one with a long history in Christian theology. His sober examination of this worry, however, is thoroughly modern and is, for this reason, typical of the prevailing disposition within philosophy and critical theory today—exemplified most notably perhaps in the work of René Girard—that wants to problematize the nature of the knowledge that authorizes divinely inspired sacrifices believed fundamentally to be moral. Belief in whatever form is dangerous because it leads us in the direction of violent sacrifice.

Girard's focus on sacrificial victims, indeed, looks squarely at the way total and meaningful knowledge is deployed to ratify sacrifices that are in fact nakedly brutal instances of persecution.[43] In both Jay and Girard, we can see that the worry over the problem of sanctified violence is really a worry about the problem of transcendent knowledge, and the reliability of the voices or words or images that motivate sacrificial conduct. How can, for example, the executor of divinely inspired violence or sacrifice *know* definitively beforehand that his or her act really is morally enjoined?[44] What does it mean to believe that your own sacrificial death is somehow part of a greater, providential good? Can God really be invoked in order to legitimize acts of violence that might more accurately be understood as having roots in human psychology and the attempt to consolidate political power? Perhaps we need only think of the latest acts of suicidal violence carried out in the name of this or that higher power—acts almost automatically reviled as fundamentalist or terrorist—to wish that their perpetrators had been a little less certain of the reliability of the knowledge that motivated their conduct.

If a politics of rupture aligns belief with rupture, then it must confront the question of sacralized violence, since this violence represents in the contemporary world the most prominent political expression of belief. The fundamentalist, as we have argued, cannot escape the contradiction of a transcendent God providing immanent directives. But there is nonetheless a form of sacrificial conduct that occurs without a transcendent guarantee but with a full-throated belief. Such conduct would sustain a connection with rupture through its insistence that God remains missing rather than present, and it is precisely God's status as missing that compels our belief and its attendant sacrifice.

Today, the prevailing strategy for dealing with the threat of sanctified violence is to argue precisely that our knowledge of God cannot ever be certain—as if there could be a language or image or story up to the task of capturing God's desires or even divinity itself.[45] Indeed today, to act in the name of God's desires, in the name of something singular and infinite and eternal you believe yourself to have access to, is already to elicit from any number of quarters a critique centered on the role of desire, power, and textuality in the construction of any transcendent Law or Truth supposed to be the guarantor of ethical conduct. This is why a whole host of otherwise disparate critical positions agree on the distance that marks any individual or group identification with a divinely grounded moral law. This distance would seem to rule out, as too extreme or radical, the sacrifice of anyone's life (including one's own) on behalf of it. Bringing our own status as finite, knowing subjects to bear on any and every notion of the ethical, contemporary philosophies of finitude end up spearheading a conceptualization of moral conduct that rests on the heeding of certain limits designed to prevent greater evil, on a kind of perpetual wariness regarding the way one's actions might lead to something worse. This is how the suspicion of the politics of rupture manifests itself in the realm of belief.

The ethical trespass constituted by the idea that one might claim meaningful knowledge of God's desires is given a first-rate exploration in John Irving's *A Prayer for Owen Meany*—a novel in which a young boy, believing himself an instrument of God, comes to believe in a series of prophetic visions and dreams that lead him to pursue his own sacrificial death by joining the military during the Vietnam War. To read this novel is to guess in advance the way these prophetic visions and dreams will be made demonstrably pathological (as nearly every single one of the other characters in the novel argues to Owen). What is shocking, however, is that Irving's novel ends up *staging the truth* of Owen's vision and divine mandate to its fatal, sacrificial end when Owen does, in fact, give his life

to save thirteen Vietnamese children in a men's room of the Phoenix airport. In staging this act without irony, *A Prayer for Owen Meany* ends up proposing that divine sacrifices *can* occur—sacrifices that work neither to sanctify violence against others nor to lend an insuperable meaning to the relationship between believers and God. Owen's sacrifice has its basis in a belief that never fills in the missing signifier or translates rupture into rapture. If for some there is something much too contrived about Owen's claim to divinity—and something "preposterous" about the function that claim ends up serving—we should like nonetheless to endorse Irving's *full identification* with Owen's sacrifice and the ontological status of the knowledge that grounds it.

Why? The answer to this question lies in the status of the knowledge that makes up the most "monstrous" of Owen's fantasies. Here, it is important to point out that Owen's commitment to a sacrificial death is never legitimized by knowledge of a pregiven good. Moreover, Owen never claims for his divine mandate some larger or more universal, salvific meaning; indeed, at no time does he extend the import of his destiny beyond its singular situation. This absence of meaning can be glimpsed in the fact that although Owen clearly acts with the conviction that God has a plan for him, that there is a reason for the seemingly contingent things that happen, he never gives a reason for the reason—the meaning behind necessity itself. Owen sustains his belief in the missing signifier without insisting on that signifier's presence in the manner of the fundamentalist. So, although Owen's knowledge of God's desire appears to be an instance in which epistemology solves an ontological deadlock, in Irving's novel that knowledge is made to carry us toward the even more difficult impasse in which the entirety of knowledge itself is forced to reckon with its own insupportable foundations. Owen's belief is the ultimate testament to our capacity for enduring rupture.

This reckoning produces the paradoxical space for a genuinely free act motivated by faith, a passionate act that wills an end for its own sake. This paradox is clarified by Owen's memorable declaration, "I DON'T *WANT* TO BE A HERO . . . IT'S NOT THAT I *WANT* TO BE—IT'S THAT I *AM* A HERO."[46] On the face of it, this claim appears to write out Owen's freedom altogether, suggesting that there is no wiggle room when it comes to knowing one's divine destiny. At a deeper level, however, Owen's claim not to want to be a hero points in the opposite direction, since wanting would imply that he is enticed by something desirable, by the specter of compensation, and is thus not acting freely. It is tempting to wonder aloud if this isn't the thing that compromises the lion's share

of divinely inspired acts—the role played in them by utilitarian political calculations and the promise of some heavenly reward.

This is what makes Owen's "monstrous" fantasy so striking: far from being driven by certain and authoritative knowledge of a pregiven good and post facto reward, Owen's sense of what he is compelled to do ends up informing an act that exceeds the very frameworks of knowledge that currently circumscribe political and religious notions of the good. What Owen's act ends up suggesting is that the value of an ethical act cannot be determined before its commission because there is nothing to establish it as ethical before the fact. In other words, via Owen's act (and the conversion it inspires in his friend who narrates the novel), the novel proposes an ethics different from our everyday conception of ethics. This is what occasions so much uncertainty—even in Owen—about the vision. And it is also what constitutes the eternal or miraculous nature of the sacrifice: only an act that does not gain its consistency by reference to a pregiven good or post facto reward is capable of introducing into a social order something truly new and transformative—something capable of stimulating new desires and new questions, as opposed to mere resignation or dutiful obedience to the status quo. Only such an act can get us to see how incomplete our finite notions of God and the good actually are. Rather than fearing the sacrificial act enabled by belief, we should view it as the proper terrain of politics as such—or the politics founded on rupture.

In this sense, *A Prayer for Owen Meany* might be trying to recover the radicalism of Christ's own sacrifice for Christianity, seeing in it not something that settles things theologically once and for all by offering definitive proof of God's benevolent desires but as making the subjective decision to believe all the more clearly dependent *on belief*. When we stake things clearly on belief as belief, we change our very ways of thinking about the world. We are able to recognize its structural incompletion in ways that avoid resignation or incremental adjustments.

Here I Stand; I Can Do No Other

There is a strong sense in which nonbelief is not possible. To adopt the position of the nonbeliever, one must reject the blank space within the structure of signification, a space that the subject implicitly avows in the simple act of speaking. As Jacques Lacan puts it, "The *dire* constitutes *Dieu*. And as long as things are said, the God hypothesis will persist."[47] The act of speaking appeals to a missing signifier that would serve as its validation,

and this missing signifier necessarily remains transcendent—and thus divine. This is why Lacan insists that we will never overcome the idea of God as long as we continue to speak. Belief does not come down to individual choice but rather to structural exigencies. This means that those who profess their nonbelief, like the new atheists, always do so with their fingers crossed.[48]

If there is no nonbelief, this chapter's argument on behalf of belief seems at best kicking at an open door and at worst obscuring the nature of the problem confronting the subject. Given the line of thought developed above, obviously we believe that belief matters. The wager here is that the recognition of belief—the active engagement in belief—dramatically changes the subject's relation to its world. That speaking is linked inexorably to a blank space in the structure of signification does not compromise the things *on whose behalf* we speak and advocate. On the contrary, if we present the signifiers at the heart of our political struggle as requiring belief, we ask for the act that is the sine qua non of political struggle. To put this another way, we must believe in the missing signifier if we are to act politically to change the world.

We might point here to an example that crystallizes this point: the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1960s. It is very clearly the case that the nonviolent protests of the civil rights movement require an act of belief on the part of their adherents. A cursory reading of Martin Luther King's *Why We Can't Wait* makes this plain. As King examines the situation in Birmingham in 1963, the fundamental signifier at the heart of the struggle to which he is devoted—nonviolent protest—can find no transparent or guaranteed meaning for its advocates and practitioners. In this way, it is unlike the discourse and methods of the two kinds of politics with which it is competing: (1) Black nationalist views of the white man as a devil and their enjoinder to attack violently exemplars of segregation and white, racist oppression in all its forms. These views and calls find their legitimizing signifiers, of course, in the discourse of white supremacy and the violence it underwrote. (2) White moderate calls for patient negotiation and the legal actions of elected civil bodies. These calls and actions find their legitimacy in the protocols of democratic elections and the constitutional process. To each of these attitudes, King poses nonviolent direct action. Only nonviolent direct action, he contends, can genuinely change the situation. And the reason for this is that there is nothing present in the situation capable of legitimizing it. Indeed, the support for nonviolent protest is something fundamentally absent—the freedom and full political equality of every citizen of the United States. This freedom and equality is in no sense immanent or inalienable. The fact that we speak it

means that it is ontologically missing. But we can believe in it, and with radical political consequences.

In the case of the civil rights movement, this act of belief in something absent enables revolutionary acts that rupture and eventually resettle the terms by which negotiated change can transpire. As King put it, the sit-ins and marches, rather than being the antipode of negotiated political arrangements, were *for the very purpose of* achieving negotiation. The belief in something absent can motivate some truly remarkable conduct: children walking peacefully to school buses for their transportation to nearby jails; adults young and old taking the full force of fire hoses. Prominent in these unheard-of, nonsensical images is the capacity of rupture to bring about other, less violent, unheard of political advances.

God played a large role in the civil rights struggle in the United States not because groups meet in churches and used Christianity as an argument for the equality they sought but because the struggle itself relied so heavily on belief in the missing signifier. The protestors constantly avowed the incompleteness of the order they contested, and God functioned as the signifier of this incompleteness. Just like the Jews who first turned to God as a form of respite from a would-be total secular authority, the advocates for civil rights founded their movement on the divine insofar as this entity indicated what the ruling racist order did not include. Though we see every day the ways that belief in the divine as a potential presence offers the illusion of a potential completion, a politics of rupture demands fidelity to belief in the necessity of a missing God, which is not atheism but instead a theism estranged from itself.

Chapter Two

Universality

The question of the existence of universals has haunted Western philosophy throughout its history. While almost no one doubts the existence of particular beings, the idea of the universal—an identity or quality shared by multiple particular beings—sparks widely divergent views. Plato argues for the existence of universal forms both of values (like justice) and of objects (like tables), whereas Locke believes that there are no universals at all but only particular entities and instances. The benefit of universals is that they allow us to make a deeper sense of the world by seeing the connections between phenomena. Universals allow us to categorize what would otherwise be an overwhelming flood of sensory data. In fact, Aristotle contends that without some conception of universality there would be no knowledge at all. In the *Metaphysics,* he notes, "All things that we know, we know in so far as they have some unity and identity, and in so far as some attribute belongs to them universally."[1] Universals enable us to gain some minimal purchase on our experience by pointing to what repeats or remains constant within it. Thanks to universals, we can find something that is the same in the many discrete particulars we encounter. Human efficiency and our very capacity for judgment owe a debt to the emergence or specification of this source of likeness: it would take longer to ask a carpenter to build a table if we did not have some shared idea of the qualities all tables share; and it would be difficult to determine and adjudicate wrongs if we did not have some common categories and protocols that constitute the administering of justice.

No one questions that universals come in handy for practical living in the world, but descriptions of their utility leave entirely to the side their political and ethical valences. That is to say, Aristotle's statement in the *Metaphysics* has an inarguable descriptive truth: we use universals in order to know the world rather than remaining simply the victims of its whims. But is this knowledge always benign or innocent? The most elementary form of the universal is the word, and language provides us

with a network of universals—a way to cognize the phenomena we encounter. For Maurice Blanchot, this manner of universalizing, when it comes to horror, reveals the squalid underside of our knowing, "the discrete complicity which maintains it in a relation with the most insupportable aspects of power." Blanchot invokes in this context the impossibly poignant attempt of the prisoner at Auschwitz who, forced to hold the heads of fellow prisoners as each was being executed with a shot to the neck, maintained a desperate sliver of command over transpiring events by claiming to have "observed the comportment of men before death."[2] Whether to greater or lesser extents, through the universal we liberate ourselves from a complete and mute subjugation to the world in which we live. But this liberation comes with a price.[3]

The danger of universality comes into clear view when one examines the history of the twentieth century—a century in which notions of universality underwrote the commission of unspeakable violence. In the twentieth century, universals did not just innocently liberate subjects from their extant lifeworlds, they promised the wholesale redemption of those lifeworlds. The appeal of Nazism is apposite here: Nazism did not simply perceive and promulgate a shared source of racial likeness, it offered up a vision wherein the realization of the racial universal would be redemptive, liberating the Aryan race and the German Reich from a dissolute modernity. This liberation promised nothing short of the chance to experience (that which is alike in) being as a whole and thus to coincide with what is universal in history itself.

But as the case of Nazism makes plain, to specify and seek to ensure the shared qualities and values of a racially endogamous German *Volk* necessarily entailed the identification and degradation of those who did not belong to the Nazi narrative of universal history's fulfillment and were thus its disease-bearing contaminants, or who had a rival narrative of universal history with themselves in a central role. This explains why, even as Hitler went to great lengths to define Jews in micro-organic terms (e.g., as parasite, maggot, vermin, and cancerous abscess), he also acknowledged the Jews' claim of historical election, declaring in 1934 to Hermann Rauschning that "there cannot be two Chosen People."[4] So the fundamental message of Nazism was clearly a universal one, but because this universality linked likeness with a redemptive wholeness, it had necessarily to be violently exclusive.

Unlike Nazism, the universal at the heart of Marxism is far more inclusive, since it has nothing to do with the immutable biology of race and does not find those bearing the universal in particular territories. If Nazism obfuscates things by seeing the Aryan race as chosen to complete

the racial struggle that is history, Marxism refuses to invoke an external entity to ground its view of history. This is to say simply that there is no external position within Marxism's theorization of history. Instead, it is the epistemological privilege of the proletariat—won in and through the experience of exploitation and oppression—that enables those invested in the communist project to unlock the universal truths of history.[5]

As Soviet and other communist leaders availed themselves of this epistemological privilege and began to make universal claims about history, the danger inherent in this conception of universality came into view. Those who would not submit themselves to the communist universal were consigned to the gulag. Their ostensible crime was always an *act* of betrayal—something one does, not something one is. That some in positions of privilege confessed their guilt in show trials before being executed only testifies to the perverse capaciousness of the universal in Marxism, its unwillingness to find in nature or biology an objective reason for excluding anyone from the universal society it sought to create. In this bizarre confession of guilt—which would be unthinkable for a Jew under Nazism—the accused traitors save the integrity of the redemptive universal that mandates their death. The point made by this confession of guilt is made a different way by Jean Améry, who likewise argues for untangling the totalitarian knot said to tie communism to National Socialism. For Améry, the universal at the heart of Marxism means that "communism could de-Stalinize itself," that regimes under the Soviet sphere could forsake torture, and even that former victims of torture could enjoy a renewed ascendancy within party ranks: "In Hungary a Party First Secretary can preside who was himself once the victim of Stalinist torture. But who is really able to imagine a de-Hitlerized National Socialism and, as a leading politician of a newly ordered Europe, a Röhm follower who in those days had been dragged through torture? No one can imagine it. It would have been impossible."[6]

That the universal at the heart of the Marxist dream was more inclusive, or that it licensed far more possibilities, than that of Nazism has done little, of course, to save the ethical and political reputation of universality. Much of the opposition on the Left to actually existing communism focused directly on the dubiousness of its claim to universality. For the thinkers of the Frankfurt School, for instance, rather than enthusiastically embracing universality, a true Leftist alternative would call the universal into question and even erect barriers to its full realization. Though someone like Theodor Adorno understands the need for universal history, it must be, he argues, both "construed and denied."[7] According to Adorno, "Discontinuity and universal history must be conceived together. To strike

To their credit, Laclau and Mouffe concede that a kind of vanity can inform the claim—at the moment of articulation—that one has fashioned a partially meaningful political nodal point while at the same time deferring the achievement of a utopian universal society (socialism's traditional "transcendental signified"). Those experiences that take us to the limits of signification itself have "a form of precise discursive presence"[18] that they call antagonism. According to Laclau and Mouffe, antagonism besets every society and undermines all pretension to completeness or wholeness. There is no harmonious social order in which all elements reconcile with one another. They explain, "Antagonism, as a witness of the impossibility of a final suture, is the 'experience' of the limit of the social. Strictly speaking, antagonisms are not *internal* but *external* to society; or rather, they constitute the limits of society, the latter's impossibility of fully constituting itself."[19] The theory of antagonism implies that every society is in some way at odds with itself, and this internal division can appear in multiple guises—as class struggle, as sexual division, as a racial split, and so on. The utopian dream of social harmony has historically led revolutionary politics astray and paved the way to totalitarianism, and it has its basis in a failure to see the impossibility of overcoming antagonism.

As Laclau and Mouffe see it, antagonism is the barrier that prevents the emergence of a pure universality and thereby opens the space in which various particular identities can construct their own universal claims. But to found a politics of contingent universals on antagonism is to sell antagonism short, missing the politically fertile connection between universality and antagonism itself, which is a moment of negation rather than the result of any positive assertion. There is no need to construct a universal—nor could one do so in any significant way—because antagonism or what we call rupture is already universal. What Laclau and Mouffe see as the condition for *constructing* unsuspected egalitarian equivalences announces already their democratic equivalence: the witness they bear to antagonism and to the necessary and structural incompletion of the social order, an incompletion that besets every social order universally. Rather than setting about to build a universal by positive, articulatory accretion—especially in an age in which everything appears a construct—we might do better to fight on behalf of universals whose solidity is writ large in the logically necessary terms of their emergence via rupture. Laclau and Mouffe are clearly right to see the way society consists of political struggles that cannot remain indifferent to one another. But the very act of naming particular struggles already attests to the antagonism that divides such struggles from themselves, and thus to the universality that connects them to other struggles.[20] Every expression of self-identity marks a self-

division between the subjectivity of the speaker and that of whom one speaks—the division between the point from which one speaks and what one says. The division between these two positions is the division of the social antagonism.[21]

The rupture internal to every social order founds a universality not limited to this order. A society's rupture with itself has a transcendental status. There are no transcendent principles that every society shares, but there is a constitutive failure that marks every society. The social order as such is ruptured from itself, and this rupture is what every social order shares. A self-identical society would be closed off from other societies and isolated in its particularity, but it would also have no means of expressing its self-identity or its isolation. In the act of articulating its particularity, a society attests to the antagonism that divides it and thus to the universality that connects it to other societies.

Locating universality within the antagonistic rupture sustains universality while avoiding the problem of epistemological privilege. One gains access to universality not by virtue of one's role as a producer but through the recognition of the social antagonism, a possibility that exists for everyone equally. But locating universality within rupture represents a major rethinking of the idea of universality. Though even Plato conceives of a rupture in being that produces the difference between ideal forms and their empirical instances, he begins a way of thinking that locates universality in an ideal realm rather than in the rupture itself. In this sense, Plato retreats from his own radical break and from the trauma of the rupture he discovers. Most thinkers subsequent to him would sustain this conception of universality and continue to associate universality with ideal forms, even if only to argue against this conception.[22]

The Platonic Cut

The relationship between the particular and the universal is not first of all a political problem. When Plato argues for the existence of universal ideas in the *Republic* or elsewhere, he does not frame universality in political terms.[23] Plato's insistence that universal ideas serve as the foundation for all appearances is an ontological claim about the nature of being. Equally, John Locke does not portray his rejection of universality—embodied by innate ideas—as a political act in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Locke's opposition to innate ideas does not figure explicitly in his political writing. And yet there does seem to be a connection between the ontological position that each thinker takes up and his politics.

Plato's ideal state as he describes it in the *Republic* is distinctly hierarchical, and this hierarchy is not unrelated to his conception of the universal. The philosopher-kings who rule this ideal state owe their privileged position in the social hierarchy to their capacity for recognizing universal ideas while others remain stuck in the illusions of appearance. The dupes of appearance rule actual society, but Plato contends that justice demands the rule of those who genuinely recognize the existence of universal ideals. This recognition is necessarily confined, as he says in the *Philebus,* "not to the masses, but only to a very few."[24] By the same token, the liberalism that Locke displays in the *Two Treatises on Government* seems to reflect the influence of his empiricist dismissal of the universal. Because there is no universality in Locke's world, the philosopher-king can have no epistemological privilege. It follows that Locke proposes a natural equality among people, and, in contrast to Plato, he defines the universality of the state in primarily a negative way, as a necessary barrier to the liberty of particular individuals.[25]

But this apparently commonsensical alignment of universality with hierarchical society and particularity with liberty is profoundly misleading. Plato's attachment to hierarchy does not derive from his universalism but from his failure to properly locate the universal, and Locke's liberalism embodies a false idea of liberty that leaves subjects unfree and unaware of the universals dominating them. Though as a political philosopher Plato is far more conservative than Locke, his adherence to universality paves the way for a much more radical political philosophy than that which inheres in Locke's empiricism. Plato implicitly conceives of a revolutionary politics in how he structures his metaphysics rather than in how he imagines the state.

When Plato articulates the metaphysical form of rupture by dividing being between ideal forms and appearances, he doesn't notice the fecundity of the rupture. The divide within being is not, for Plato, the source of any values. What stands on either side of the divide—ideal forms and appearances—occupies all of Plato's attention, not the rupture itself. He locates value in the ideal forms rather than in the cut that produces them because, in contrast to the forms themselves, this cut has no ontological status for him. As a result, he attributes universality to the ideal forms: the ideal forms of the circle, of the dog, and of justice, to take three examples, are all universals that are never instantiated in any particular manifestation of these forms. In this way, Plato generates the philosophical problem of the uninstantiated universal, which continues to trouble philosophy up to the present day. Plato's philosophy introduces the concept of universality, but by linking universality to the ideal forms, it effectuates a repression of rupture and a deformation of this concept. Universality becomes linked to the stability of an ideal and not to the disruptiveness of a split in being.

The inability to recognize the rupture created by his own thought stems from the way that Plato understands epistemology. He believes that our recognition of imperfection or lack in an object necessarily implies the prior knowledge of an ideal form that has perfection. He advances, in other words, an epistemology of reminiscence. In the *Phaedo,* he notes, "We must then possess knowledge of the Equal before that time when we first saw the equal objects and realized that all these objects strive to be like the Equal but are deficient in this."[26] Without the reminiscence of the ideal, no perception of the imperfection of the appearance would be possible. This epistemological claim has an ontological provenance: appearance must be generated out of universal ideal forms. Otherwise, we couldn't explain how the act of perception, which clearly involves a recognition of lack, might work. If we didn't know the ideal, we could never perceive beings as something less than ideal.

But there is another way of explaining the role of the ideal in perception without positing its ontological priority. Rather than idealizing experience and deducing the imperfect appearance from the eternal form, Plato might have deduced the ideal form or the universal from the division within the appearance itself. Every appearance that we confront in its particularity suggests an ideal that is not confined to the particular place of the appearance. Appearances never allow us to remain solely on the level of appearance but inherently suggest a being that exists beyond the appearance. The fact that Plato can posit an ideal form distinct from the appearance must in some way be made possible by the realm of appearance itself. Appearance must be divided in order to make the very act of thinking of an ideal form imaginable. The self-division of appearance isn't the product of the ideal but produces the ideal. The appearance of an empirical table with evident flaws enables us to think of an ideal form of the table because its appearance is now exhaustive for us. The appearance of an object enables us to think of that same object outside the limits of its appearing, even if it has no actual existence outside these limits. Plato might be completely incorrect about the ideal forms—and almost everyone today would agree that he is—but he is nonetheless able to think them. And it is this capacity for thought that attests to a division within appearance.[27]

In his underappreciated *Theory of the Subject,* Alain Badiou makes this point in another way.[28] He claims that the encounter with an object in its place gives rise to the idea of the object out of place—what Plato would

theorize as the ideal form of the object. According to Badiou, "All that is relates to itself at a distance from itself owing to the place where it is."[29] In this view, dialectic is not the imposition of logic on being or the result of the introduction of the signifier. Instead, it emerges out of the inherent split in each particular between its place and its being, which always exceeds the particular's position in the world. Every particular appearance suffers from this self-division in which universality manifests itself.

Locke's empiricist reduction of being to particularity and of ideas to perceptions fails to account for the self-division of appearances. He can dismiss Plato's ideal forms as pure illusions, but he can't explain why these illusions arise at all. All attempts at moving beyond the particular run aground because the true essences of things, according to Locke, "are so far from our discovery or comprehension."[30] But Plato is nonetheless able to propose such essences, and this is what Locke does not attempt to explain. The problem is that the world for empiricists like Locke is whole: there is no space in the world of particulars for us to gain any purchase on them, even through language itself. When Locke talks about the perception of particular objects, he attests to a division in appearances that his philosophy rejects. There is no cut in the particular that would enable the absolute particularist to speak about particulars. The empiricist world is one that, if it existed, would never have allowed for the emergence of speaking beings.

Plato's radicality as a thinker stems from his recognition of the split in being, but the radicality has a corresponding conservatism, which consists in his identification of the ideal form with universality. As a result of this conservative turn, Plato treats universality as irrevocably fixed. Universals have always existed and hence do not come into being. Particulars, on the other hand, have a history: they are born and die. The fixed view of the universal rules out the possibility of any substantial change in the world. The form of justice already exists, and it is only a matter of approximating this form as best one can in everyday life. Though we can create particulars, there is no possibility for the creation of a new universal.[31] Plato's desire to locate universality in the ideal forms that are the product of the split in being rather than in the split itself blinds him to the possibility of new universals. As an ideal form, the universal loses the historicity that it has through its very emergence as a universal.

Though Plato is the discoverer of universality through rupture, the particular way in which he conceives universality blinds subsequent philosophers to universality's connection with rupture. The result is that Western philosophy becomes almost completely oriented around idealism and loses touch with being in its self-division. This turn becomes especially

evident within Neoplatonism, where the all trumps the recognition of the split between forms and appearances. As the greatest of Neoplatonists, Plotinus, puts it in the second *Ennead,* "The All persists: the ground of all the change must itself be changeless."[32] The divide that becomes so pronounced at key moments in Plato's work is nowhere to be found in the philosophy of Plotinus. This is a "forgetting of being" even more pernicious than the forgetting that Heidegger critiques, though it is not unrelated, and it continues until the epoch of German idealism. Plato, as everyone knows, functions as the parent figure for the Western tradition, but this tradition has missed where his true parentage resides.

Introducing History into Eternity

A fixed view of the universal rules Western philosophy from Plato to Kant, even when philosophers, such as Aristotle, remove universality from the otherwordly realm where Plato locates it and allow it to be instantiated in actual beings. Aristotle's rejection of the uninstantiated universal does not represent a fundamental departure from the Platonic conception. And even when Kant gives universals a purely epistemological—rather than an ontological—status, they do not lose their fixity. His theoretical philosophy articulates universals that are the basis for all possible experience, and Kant attempts to prove the existence of these universals by showing the impossibility of experience without them. Here, the universal is what cannot be violated, and this constitutes its imperviousness to change.

It is only with Hegel, the first conscious philosopher of rupture, that universality becomes associated with revolutionary change. As Hegel sees it, universality (*Allgemeinheit*) emerges through historical revolutions, so that different epochs have different universals.[33] This historicization of the universal inherently forges a link between rupture and universality because the rupture in history represents the force that gives birth to the new universal. This alignment of universality with rupture is the great political gesture in the history of Western philosophy. By accomplishing it, Hegel creates the possibility of challenging the ruling universals not by calling for the abandonment of the universal but by insisting on a new form. Hegel historicizes the universal without reducing it to history and thereby denuding it of its power.[34]

Hegel avoids reducing the universal to history by focusing on the disjunction between the emergent universal and the context from which it comes. A context can never simply give birth to its own universal, because an antagonism pervades every context. Whereas the typical historicist

finds the determining causes of a phenomenon in the historical milieu that produces it, Hegel, a historicist of the universal, locates the germination of the new universal in the contextual antagonism.

Hegel's philosophy would not permit an analysis like that which Max Weber employs to explain the emergence of the capitalist universal. Weber views the history of Protestantism as the cause that generates capitalism, and he traces the underpinnings of the capitalist economy to their roots in the Protestant view of the world. For example, Weber claims that the self-renunciation and sacrifice that capitalist production requires from its laborers has its origins in "the spirit of Christian asceticism."[35] From Hegel's perspective, the "protestant ethic" could not function as a coherent cause because it is not a unified ethic. The asceticism of the Protestant ethic depends on an ideal of future profligacy that both subtends and contradicts it. The new universal is not reducible to historical determinants that do not themselves exist.

Throughout his philosophy, Hegel's focus is always on the emergence of the universal—and thus its association with rupture—rather than on its positive assertion. Each time that one attempts to ground a system of thought or a social order on a universal, the contradictions that beset positive universality reveal the untenable status of this grounding. In Hegel's thought, there is a universality of negation that cannot be translated into any positive form. One arrives at the absolute not when one finally achieves a positive universality but when one accedes to its impossibility and identifies universality with rupture. This identification becomes apparent at each point where Hegel depicts the emergence of universality through contradiction and negation.

Perhaps the most famous example occurs with the emergence of freedom as a universal value in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. According to Hegel's account, the ideal of freedom is not eternal or lying inherent in nature. Instead, it arises ironically out of servitude or the slave's subjection to the master. Servitude is the product, for Hegel, of a struggle in which two subjects confront each other in order to gain the other's recognition. The only happy outcome of this struggle is submission of one or the other. One subject submits and agrees to recognize the other in order to avoid death, and it is in this submission—and the break that it authorizes—that a new universal emerges. The subject who wins the struggle and refuses to submit, the master, as long as she or he remains in the position of mastery, has no access to this new universal.[36] The slave creates the ideal of freedom through the rupture with its immediate being.

The slave submits to the master because it experiences an absolute terror when confronted with the master's violence, and this terror enables

the slave, unlike the master, to transcend her or his immediate being and thereby form the possibility of freedom. As Hegel puts it in the third volume of the *Encyclopedia,* "The slave rises above the selfish individuality of the natural will, and his worth to that extent exceeds that of his master who, imprisoned in his egotism, beholds in the slave only his immediate will and is only formally recognized by an unfree consciousness. The subjugation of the slave's egotism forms the *beginning* of true human freedom."[37] Whereas the typical idea of freedom conceives it either as a natural law or an empirical human construction, Hegel sees how it emerges without being constructed. Because the slave loses the immediate connection to natural being that the master sustains, the slave creates a new universal.

The emergence of freedom from the dialectic of the master and slave is not, however, Hegel's only account of the emergence of a new universal in the *Phenomenology.* In fact, the book is full of such occurrences. The most important instance of the creation of a new universal, however, occurs with the rise of Christianity. This is, for Hegel, the great revolution in the history of thought. Christianity introduces the individual as a value in itself, a value inconceivable for a thinker like Plato who lives prior to the Christian epoch.[38] The individual becomes a new universal through the rupture with an earlier conception of God that Christianity effectuates. The rupture itself is the key to the new universal, since it provides the form that this new universal will take. Without the specific break that Christianity accomplishes, it could not affirm individuality as a universal.[39] It is in the revolution achieved in the conception of God that the new universal emerges.

Whereas earlier religions and philosophies located God or the infinite in the beyond, Christianity brings God down to earth. In the figure of Christ, the infinite appears in the finite, not apart from it. As Hegel sees it, Christ is not just a contingent vehicle in which the transcendent God manifests itself but instead God's actual form of appearance. Most Christians fail to take Christ's form seriously and instead cling to his divine content, which enables them to sustain their belief in the transcendent God along with their acceptance of Christ. Such Christians are not, for Hegel, worthy of the name. For authentic Christianity, Christ is God, and when he dies on the cross, the God of the beyond dies as well. With this gesture, God ceases to be a transcendent being that humans can never know and comes to exist within humanity itself.[40]

Individuals gain an infinite worth because they now partake of the infinitude of God. The individual is the new universal that Christianity introduces, and this universal comes into being through Christianity's negation

of the transcendent God. As long as God remained in the transcendent beyond, the individual could never have a value in itself; the infinite would exist outside the finite individual. But with Christianity the infinite abandons its transcendent position and shows itself within the realm of finitude. This rupture in the conception of God forms the essence of Christianity's new universal. As the transcendent God dies through Christ, the individual takes on this God's infinitude and the value associated with it, but it is only God's death that makes this possible.

Though Hegel never uses the German equivalent of the term "rupture" (perhaps *Bruch* is the closest translation) in the sense that we do, he does explicitly privilege negation as a creative act. His direct association of universality with rupturing negation marks the decisive moment in the history of Western philosophy. From this point on, universality loses the conservative character that it has from Plato to Kant. To insist on the universal no longer means to insist on immutable forms or fixed a priori judgments. Universality becomes the product of revolutionary change. After Hegel, it becomes apparent that it is the negation rather than the affirmation of hitherto immutable forms that gives rise to universality. This new understanding of universality appears clearly in a movement that Hegel quietly applauded from afar—the Haitian Revolution.

"La Marseillaise" in Haiti

Hegel's affection for the French Revolution has long been known and has even acquired a mythic status. According to one of the most famous legends about Hegel, he and his friends Hölderlin and Schelling erected a Freedom Tree on July 14, 1793, to commemorate Bastille Day and express their allegiance to the French Revolution, even as the revolutionary terror had already begun.[41] This legend, whether true or not, has such staying power because of the primacy that the French Revolution has for Hegel's entire philosophy. Thirteen years later, while writing the *Phenomenology,* Hegel criticizes the Reign of Terror but continues to celebrate the Revolution itself.[42] At the same time, he appears to say nothing about the revolution in Haiti, despite its concrete connection to the principles articulated in the French Revolution.

But in *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History,* Susan Buck-Morss contends that Hegel's discussion of the dialectic of the master and slave grew out of his analysis of and sympathy with the Haitian Revolution. As Buck-Morss and other Hegel scholars point out, the very idea of the dialectic of the master and slave derives from Hegel's reading of journals and newspapers chronicling the events in Haiti, events that he followed closely and sympathetically. The Haitian Revolution enables Hegel to see how freedom, a political value, might emerge from economic conditions. It allows him to change from an economic terrain to a political one. Though it would have been politically dangerous for him to make a direct reference to the Haitian Revolution, his association of the universality of freedom with the slave, as Buck-Morss sees it, comments implicitly on this revolution and even reveals that Hegel takes the side of the revolting slaves.

Just as Hegel never explicitly mentions the French Revolution or his sympathy for it in the *Phenomenology* and yet clearly alludes to it, he does the same with the Haitian Revolution. But scholars, armed with a bias that essentially ignores this revolution, have missed the evident allusions, while they haven't missed those to the French Revolution. The Haitian Revolution attests to the universality inherent in the French Revolution, a universality that transcends those who initially produced it. According to Buck-Morss, "The black Jacobins of Saint-Domingue surpassed the metropole in actively realizing the Enlightenment goal of human liberty, seeming to give proof that the French Revolution was not simply a European phenomenon but world-historical in its implications."[43] Haiti shows, for Hegel, that barriers of race and nation fall in the face of the ideals of the French Revolution.[44] The universality produced by the French Revolution returns in Haiti to attack the French themselves, who become, under Napoléon, the agents of their own particular cause. In Haiti, universality is on the side of the revolting Haitians, not that of the invading Europeans.[45]

The leader of the Haitian Revolution, Toussaint-Louverture, saw himself as doing the work of the French Revolution rather than struggling against it. The ideals of the French Revolution were his guiding ideals, and they informed his prosecution of the struggle in Haiti. This becomes apparent with Toussaint's 1801 Constitution for the colony. As Nick Nesbitt puts it, "The publishing of the 1801 Constitution . . . was in many respects the culmination of Toussaint's decade-old attempt to reorient the society of Saint-Domingue away from the arbitrary violence of slavery and to ground social relations upon the universal, abstract law of human autonomy."[46] He did not lead a revolt on behalf of Haitian national identity but instead one founded on the notions of liberty and equality articulated during the French Revolution. Though an independent nation was born in 1804, the Haitian Revolution became nationalist only after the French abandoned the universality that their Revolution originated. The relationship between France and Haiti during the revolutionary period shows the difficulty of sustaining universality without retreating into the

security of particularity in the form of nation, as the French do under the Thermidor and especially under Napoléon. This relationship also demonstrates that the difficulty of sustaining universality stems directly from universality's connection to rupture. In order to hold fast to universality, one must remain within the traumatic rupture or at least organize one's existence around it.

In the immediate aftermath of the storming of the Bastille, the French adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. Though this document establishes human rights as universal, it makes no mention of slavery and thus leaves the slaves of Saint Domingue (the colony that would become Haiti) in their servitude. The Declaration expressed universality but initially failed to be fully universal. Certain French revolutionaries expressed vehement opposition to slavery, but this position was too radical and impractical to find its way into the Declaration.[47] Nonetheless, the articulation of universal rights creates the eventual basis for the slave revolt. In response to unrest in Saint Domingue, the French government returned to the universality of the original Declaration and expanded its significance. On March 28, 1792, the Legislative Assembly voted to grant political rights to free blacks and mulattoes, and on February 4, 1794, the National Convention voted to abolish slavery in French colonies. But in 1802, Napoléon reestablished slavery and sent armies to Haiti to enforce the decree.

The momentous decision by the National Convention to abolish slavery did not occur in a vacuum. Toussaint's revolt in Saint Domingue in 1793, which occurred as he took the side of Spanish invaders, clearly precipitated it. And yet it marked a point at which the revolutionary government in France remained within the rupture constituted by its own revolution. The vote to end slavery disrupted the stability of the nation and of property interests. Napoléon's reinstitution of slavery, in contrast, represented a stabilizing return to nation and property. Napoléon's rise to power coincided with a French retreat from rupture and its attendant universality. Napoléon came to power through a restoration of order and of particular identity. In return for the abandonment of universality, he offered nationalist pride and security. Even as he tried to conquer the world, he worked to repress the great rupture of the French Revolution. In doing so, he forced the Haitian Revolution to adopt a nationalist turn as well.

In Haiti, the former slaves confronted the attacking French soldiers sent by Napoléon with chants of the revolutionary songs from the French Revolution—"La marseillaise" and the "Ça ira." As C. L. R. James recounts in *The Black Jacobins,* his classic history of the Haitian Revolution, this caused the French soldiers, who still conceived of themselves as

the partisans of the Revolution, to wonder if they were on the right side of history. The former slaves could adopt the French anthems because these anthems had acquired a universal significance and were thus completely divorced from French particularity.[48] When the French abandon the rupture and its universality, they lose access to the idea of the "La marseillaise," even if they continue to mouth the words. It is the Haitian former slaves who come to embody its universal idea. To transform it into a national anthem and to associate it with a particular national identity rather than with universal emancipation is, in contrast, to betray its essence.

Of the three great revolutions at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, the Haitian Revolution receives the least attention.[49] While the Left tends to value the French Revolution and the Right sympathizes with the American Revolution, the Haitian Revolution is often lost in the shuffle.[50] But the Haitian Revolution, despite coming last chronologically, is the most philosophically significant of the three. Haiti separates the revolutionary universals from their particular site of enunciation and thereby proves their universality. The form that the Haitian Revolution assumes reveals that the universality unleashed by the French Revolution was not constrained by the place where it emerged. The fact that the revolutionaries in Haiti take up universals already articulated in France does not lessen the importance of their revolution, it magnifies it.

What's more, the Haitian Revolution placed devotion to the political principles of the revolution above all other concerns in a way that neither the French nor American Revolutions did. In the first two revolutions, the radicality of the rupture was tempered by efforts to compromise with the exigencies of a capitalist economy and with institutionalized servitude. Peter Hallward points out the superiority of the Haitian Revolution in relation to its two more-celebrated predecessors. He says, "Only in Haiti was the declaration of human freedom universally consistent. Only in Haiti was this declaration sustained *at all costs,* in direct opposition to the social order and economic logic of the day."[51] The great hostility that the Haitian Revolution provoked around the world stems in large part from the fact that it committed itself more fervently to rupture than either the French or American Revolutions. Not only is it the first successful slave revolt in human history, but it is also the revolution most devoted to universality.

Though it ends just as badly (if not worse) than the French Revolution, the Haitian Revolution is the great event in modernity. It punctuates the spirit of the French Revolution by attesting to the nullity of cultural

difference in the face of the universality of rupture. It allows Susan Buck-Morss to conclude (in a passage well worth quoting in its entirety),

> rather than giving multiple, distinct cultures equal due, whereby people are recognized as part of humanity indirectly through the mediation of collective cultural identities, human universality emerges in the historical event at the point of rupture. It is in the discontinuities of history that people whose culture has been strained to the breaking point give expression to a humanity that goes beyond cultural limits. And it is in our empathetic identification with this raw, free, and vulnerable state that we have a chance of understanding what they say. Common humanity exists in spite of culture and its differences. A person's nonidentity with the collective allows for subterranean solidarities that have a chance of appealing to universal, moral sentiment, the source today of enthusiasm and hope. It is not through culture but through the threat of culture's betrayal that consciousness of a common humanity comes to be.[52]

In a time dominated by seemingly infinite assertions of cultural particularity as the ultimate horizon of thought, the Haitian Revolution stands as a reminder that universality has the power to trump the particularity of culture. The people of Haiti did not revolt in the name of this particularity but for the sake of the universal. But the universal retains its power to trump particularity only insofar as we sustain its connection with rupture, which is always a task replete with risk.

The example of the Haitian Revolution is misleading insofar as it emphasizes the positive aspects of universality. After all, who isn't on the side of the revolting slaves against Napoléon's troops? But this obscures the onerous burden of universality that stems from its origin in rupture. When one remains faithful to universality, one also remains faithful to the cut in being that deprives the subject of any secure foundation or sense of rootedness. The partisans of universality come from particular cultures, but they lack any cultural identity. Cultural particularity exists for them only as a loyalty that they must perpetually betray.[53]

The Limitations of Aristarchus

The political importance of universality lies not just in the connections that it facilitates. Solidarity does not necessarily depend on universality. But without universality conceived in its historicity, it is impossible to envision revolution or radical transformation. The idea of the universal

is inextricable from how we might think about change. On the one hand, change occurs constantly. We don't require Heraclitus to tell us that no moment is exactly the same as the prior one. And yet momentary change often works to ensure that everything remains the same. Nowhere is this phenomenon more evident than in the arena of contemporary consumption. Companies constantly introduce new products in order to hide the monotony of the commodity form and the incessant dissatisfaction that it creates. The newest soft drink flavor or video game turns us away from the possibility of a complete rupture with the capitalist system as such. As long as we have new commodities, we will remain distracted from anything authentically new. Real change would require not just new particulars but a new universal.

Just as one cannot imagine any genuine change without a new universality, one cannot imagine a new universality without a rupture. New universals emerge throughout history when one system transforms into another. Without a revolutionary break that disrupts the ruling structure of signification, the previously existing universals will sustain their hegemony. Because universals necessarily offer a complete explanation of the phenomena that they address, they will never collapse without a rupture that uproots their authority and makes clear that another authority is possible. With a revolutionary break, however, new universals can emerge to change the foundational ways of thinking and acting that predominated.

In his famous account of how revolutions in science occur, Thomas Kuhn divides the history of each science between its revolutionary epochs and its times of normal science.[54] These latter times involve the working out of the various conceptual and experimental problems bequeathed by the revolutionary emergence of the new scientific paradigm. Though the period of normal science can identify anomalies in the paradigm and make evident contradictions, it is only the revolutionary epoch that can install a new paradigm. Normal science can pave the way for the new universal, but it necessarily remains within the universality of the ruling paradigm. A revolution is exigent if one is to discover a new universal.

According to Kuhn, the new universal doesn't provide a truer description of the world, but it does offer a more elegant picture that solves the contradictions inherent in the old paradigm. Kuhn attempts to eschew any existential judgment when he compares paradigms because what is important for him is the power of the paradigm shift. The revolutionary moment of the paradigm shift changes our way of looking and introduces a new universality. But without the revolution, no new universality would be thinkable. The revolutionary break creates a space in which universality can emerge.

Within the Ptolemaic world, for example, universal laws predict the movement of stars and planets. If someone were to discover astronomical bodies that move in unexpected and unaccounted for ways, astronomers would simply adjust the Ptolemaic laws or dismiss the findings as anomalies within the system. As long as geocentrism remained the ruling paradigm, no new universals could emerge unless they were already implicit within the ruling paradigm. The Copernican revolution, however, brings with it a new set of universal laws. As a result, a fundamental change occurs. The Church spares no degree of terror in executing people and threatening others because the Copernican system represents a genuine change rather than a change in which everything remains the same. The courage of those who embrace the new system in its infancy, like Giordano Bruno, is the courage of the universal itself.

The universal does not arise in the wake of the revolution as the product of the revolutionary fervor. Rather, it emerges from the cut in the scientific or social fabric that the revolution accomplishes. That is to say, the new universality that the Copernican system ushers in is inextricable from its revolutionary negation of the Ptolemaic system. This is why one cannot simply say that Aristarchus, writing in the third century B.C.E., already articulated Copernican heliocentrism. One of Kuhn's main points is that Aristarchus—or other apparently prescient figures like him—do not participate in the universality that he anticipates because he does not arrive at it through a revolutionary rupture. Though Aristarchus places the sun in the center of the solar system, he is not doing so in response to the eighteen-hundred-year dominance of the Ptolemaic system. The rupture with this system is the Copernican system, not simply a contingent aspect of its appearance.[55]

The identification of universality with rupture manifests itself beyond the confines of scientific revolutions. Though revolutionaries in all arenas present their new universals as distinct from the ruling systems that they are fighting against, they always include the negation of the ruling systems in their presentation. When they do this, they are not simply clearing the ground for the new universal but instead formulating the conditions of its emergence. The universal is forged from the rupture with the ruling system, which is why Marx spends so much time talking about the political economists, why Wollstonecraft spends so much time talking about patriarchal society, and why Fanon spends so much time talking about the structures of colonialism. Universality resides in negating the oppressiveness of what is.

The particular is ultimately the manifestation of what is. Being is particular. The insistence on a particular identity can never enact a revolutionary disruption because particularity is always given, not what is achieved. The struggle on behalf of particularity is an implicit surrender to being itself. But the identification of particularity and being does not proceed without a gap. No particular is fully itself, which means that at the heart of every cultural identity resides a kernel of absolute foreignness. This is why Hegel insists that deeds reveal a truth that intentions belie: in the act, the particular's estrangement from itself becomes manifest. This self-estrangement of particular beings represents our sole reason for hope. Being is split, which creates the opening through which the universal emerges. But this opening requires its revolutionary champions in order to make itself felt.

Given the importance that cultural particularity has today, we have come to believe that universality threatens to manifest itself everywhere and that we must fight to sustain our particularity in the face of universality's onslaught. This is the logic of the stockbroker trying to game the market economy and the terrorist trying to destroy it. These seeming opponents share a love for their endangered particularity that an omnipotent universal threatens. But in fact sustaining cultural particularity represents no challenge at all. There are no heroes of the particular. It is universality that requires champions, but the difficulty of championing universality is in the rupture that underwrites it. The champion of universality exists amid the insecurity of the rupture.

Tautological Political Struggles

The difficulty of universality resides in the absence of unity associated with it. While particularity can offer the illusion of a unified wholeness and permit us to gain a sense of identity, universality provides no such respite. Instead, it is what cuts us in two. This makes articulations of universality always vexed. The political salience of this point can be glimpsed by considering Dave Eggers's novel *What Is the What*—the novelistic autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng, one of the Lost Boys of the Second Sudanese Civil War (fought largely between Muslim, Arabic-speaking Sudanese of the north and African Sudanese of the south).

The novel's title comes from a creation myth told by Valentino's father that establishes the Dinka (the largest indigenous tribe of southern Sudan) as God's elect. In the myth, we are told that God created first a Dinka man and woman, giving them the most fertile land and making them tall and strong and beautiful. God then shows them cattle and offers them a choice: the cattle or the What. When the first Dinka man asks,

"What is the What?" God replies that he cannot say but that still the man must choose. For Valentino's father, the story describes a test meant to see if human beings can appreciate and take pleasure in a gift from God, rather than opt for the unknown. The man and woman choose the cattle because it is a source of nourishment capable of reproducing, and their choice ostensibly sets the Dinka on the path to prosperity. In its telling, it is the Arabs who were said to have received the What, marking them as inferior and forcing them into cattle stealing: "God had given the Dinka superior land, fertile and rich, and had given them cattle, and though it was unfair, that was how God intended it and there was no changing it."[56] What we meet with here is a creation story that would seem to lead only to conflict.

The Dinka have their narrative of divine election, but so too do the Muslims of northern Sudan, who precipitated the war by abducting, enslaving, and converting the Dinka of southern Sudan and by seeking to impose Sharia law on them—no doubt because of a gift that God bestowed on them. For a boy who has seen and suffered what Valentino has, the creation myth of his father has lost all credibility: whatever gift God had in mind for the Dinka, it is surely something besides the prosperity that comes with cattle and land. Unsurprisingly, Valentino returns repeatedly over the course of the novel to the question of the What, asking various figures of authority about what it might be in order to couple it with a signified. At each turn, however, he fails to find an answer to the question.

The brilliance of Eggers's novel lies not in the fact that Valentino never finds an answer to the question—as if there is something of political solidity in the platitude that what is important is the search itself. No, the key to the novel is that Eggers denies the question its interrogative status. Rather than a query, Eggers announces in the title that *there is nothing behind* the What, that it is a pure signifier of itself. Whatness, we could say, thus *precedes* all notions of reference. We are reminded of this in self-identical, tautological phrases like "What is the What." (It is interesting to note that the closest Valentino comes to acknowledging the self-identicalness of the What comes, at the age of eight or nine, in the context of his first encounter with sexual difference in the refugee camp in Ethiopia. Asked to play "hide-and-seek" with the Royal Nieces of Pinyudo, he is ordered to seek what is hidden under one of the girls' shirts: "I forced my hand to make cursory explorations around Agar's torso," he writes. "I didn't know what was what."[57])

Reading this back into the creation story told by Valentino's father, we should claim that *this* is the true gift of God—the singular and universal gift of signification. From this vantage point, the What is neither the mark of God's disfavor nor a cipher for the unknown. In the face of horrible events, the task of thinking might ultimately be not to question—the "piety of thought" for Heidegger that avoids totalizing closure[58]—but to declare tautologies whose very lingual dimension contains the gap that makes human action possible: what is the What, exploitation is exploitation, the state is the state, and so on.[59] The tautology foregrounds the universality of the signifying break by refusing to qualify the signifier with any particular predicate.

The political use of the tautology functions as a clear rejoinder to efforts at denying a particular group access to the universal. In the gay-marriage debate in the United States beginning in the 1990s, opponents of gay marriage stressed the particular orientation of marriage, which nonetheless functioned for them as a universal. These opponents proclaimed, "Marriage is heterosexual marriage." Qualifying marriage as particularly heterosexual restricts the universality of marriage, but it also denies the rupture of the universal signifier by taking the focus away from the signifier and placing it on the signified. The enemies of gay marriage want to occasion a debate about what marriage means rather than allow gay couples to highlight the signifier "marriage" without any signified attached to it.

Though there were no actual instances of gay-marriage supporters taking to the streets under the tautological banner "Marriage is marriage," this was in effect the slogan of the gay-marriage movement. Proponents did not call the universality of marriage into question or try to translate this universality into their own particular idiom. Efforts at the translation of marriage into a particularly gay idiom would have had no positive traction, but the gay-marriage movement had, despite serious setbacks, substantial victories.[60] Instead, they showed that their relationships fit in the gap opened up by the signifier every bit as much as heterosexual relationships did. "Marriage is marriage" becomes the implicit argument that propelled political victories that would have been unimaginable twenty years earlier.

The tautology reveals that the universal is neither natural nor constructed but resides in the signifying cut. When we turn to it in political struggle, we affirm universality against the pull of particularism, but at the same time we ground this universality in the absence of any ground. The universal of the tautology is not an ideal form that always exists but a universal that must emerge. Access to it depends on the refusal to find it meaningful, the refusal to permit it to signify something. The moment that

the new universal acquires any sort of meaning, we lose it altogether. Gay marriage, for example, cannot come to signify belonging or completion. Universals remain universal only insofar as we avoid predicating them with particulars that would rescue us from the trauma of the rupture.

Chapter Three

Solidarity

When Ronald Reagan was president of the United States in the midst of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, he expressed the wish that Martians would invade the earth. Only with a common enemy, he thought, could a genuine solidarity take hold between the Cold War enemies whose animus threatened to render the planet uninhabitable. This was a Freudian moment for Reagan. It is Freud's contention that solidarity emerges only through the formation of an enemy. Without the external enemy, the internal antagonism of the collective comes to the fore and gives the lie to any sense of solidarity. Solidarity exists, but it always comes at the price of the enemy who threatens it and who must be destroyed.

Freud's analysis of solidarity stems largely from looking at military and religious groups. In each case, a cohesive unit forms in which members experience solidarity with other members. But the bond that members have with one another is an ambivalent one, and in order to avoid allowing that ambivalence to undermine the group's solidarity, the hate must be directed outward while the love is directed inward. With military groups, this process is easy to see: the enemy is another unit trying to destroy one's own. But even with religious groups, a fierce dichotomy of inside and outside necessarily develops. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego,* Freud notes, "A religion, even if it calls itself the religion of love, must be hard and unloving to those who do not belong to it. Fundamentally indeed every religion is in this same way a religion of love for all those whom it embraces; while cruelty and intolerance toward those who do not belong to it are natural to every religion."[1] Freud locates the emergence of religious solidarity in the formation of the threatening outsider. One doesn't fully belong to the group until one begins to hate this outsider.

There is much evidence for Freud's thesis throughout the history of group behavior. When soldiers kill the enemy, they feel as if they really belong to the army.[2] Christians finally sense their belonging to the church

when they proselytize to unbelievers, and the Mormons even institutionalize this encounter with outsiders by sending the young on two-year missions just after they come of age. Perhaps the most dramatic instance of achieving solidarity with the group through the outsider occurred in the American South at the end of the nineteenth century. One proved oneself a member of the white Christian community by participating in or turning a blind eye to the lynchings of the Ku Klux Klan. This violence toward an external enemy created a bond of solidarity among white southerners that still occasions nostalgia today. In each case, the outsider is not a threat to solidarity but constitutive of it. Freud cannot envision a form of solidarity without this necessarily aggressive dimension.

Freud's diagnosis of communism is consistent with his critique of religious solidarity. Communism creates a bond among the members of the communist society because they hate and destroy the bourgeoisie, the force that threatens their bond. Once the bourgeoisie has been destroyed, the communists must find another external enemy. In *Civilization and Its Discontents,* Freud notes, "One only wonders, with concern, what the Soviets will do after they have wiped out their bourgeois."[3] Even the realization of a socialist society would not end the quest for new external enemies to struggle against. The cohesion of socialist society depends on them as much as the southern society controlled by the KKK.[4]

Though the external enemy can distract attention from the internal antagonism, it cannot eliminate it completely. As Freud sees it, envy undermines group solidarity even with the existence of the external enemy to diminish it. Envy stems directly from the central role that enjoyment plays in the subject's existence. If enjoyment were simply an emotion that the subject experienced or had for itself, there would be no problem. The subject could rest secure in its own enjoyment and remain indifferent to the enjoyment of others. But enjoyment does not belong to the subject; rather, the subject belongs to its enjoyment. That is to say, the subject experiences its own enjoyment as an invasion from the outside. The subject doesn't control or master its enjoyment, but this enjoyment masters it. The subject's own enjoyment appears in the form of the enjoying Other, which means that the enjoying subject can never just leave the Other alone.

It is as if there is an inextricable bond between enjoyment and envy, as if we can enjoy only through the envy of the Other's enjoyment. This structure of enjoyment renders solidarity almost unimaginable. In *Imagine There's No Woman,* Joan Copjec explains the deleterious effects stemming from the specific envy of enjoyment. She claims, "For if one simply envied an object, one could devise strategies—even vicious ones—to steal

it away from another. But no strategy can ever be devised to take back the *pleasure* of which we feel we have been robbed if the source of that pleasure—which is in the possession of the other—is unappealing to us. No strategy but one: destroying the other's ability to take pleasure, to enjoy."[5] The envy of the Other's enjoyment will sabotage every attempt to constitute social solidarity. Even the most egalitarian societies will not be able to avoid this envy, which always sees more enjoyment in the Other than in the subject because the Other's enjoyment is the source of the subject's own and thus necessarily primary.[6] To write envy out of our social arrangements would be to do the impossible: to write enjoyment out of them at the same time.

But this does not mean that we must give up on the value of solidarity altogether. Ironically, it is Freud himself who shows the way to understanding solidarity outside of his cogent critique. In his myth of the formation of civilization out of the primal horde in *Totem and Taboo,* Freud imagines a primal father ruling a horde and hoarding the sexual enjoyment of all the women in the group. In response to this perceived injustice, the sons of the primal father decide to kill him and share the women among themselves. They are able to set up a stable society and act in solidarity, Freud claims, because they share the guilt that comes from their collective parricide. The guilt that they experience—renewed with the totem meal—reminds them of the external enemy whom they have defeated and cements their solidarity. The totem meal repeats the crime and the guilt, which is why everyone in the community must participate in it.

According to Freud, the Christian Eucharist takes up the function of the totem meal. Each member of the community ratifies their belonging by taking part in the killing of Christ by eating his body. All are brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. Christianity mystifies the shared guilt of the totem meal with the image of Christ washing away all sins, but the solidarity that the Eucharist produces depends on the presence of this guilt, which then makes possible salvation. The Christian collective is, for Freud, a repetition of the band of brothers from the primal horde, bonded together through their crime against the ultimate outsider—the father.

Of course, the story that Freud relates in *Totem and Taboo* about the brothers in the primal horde banding together to kill the father who was monopolizing all the women is just a myth. But it nonetheless instructs us concerning the nature and appeal of rupture. In fact, it provides the paradigm of rupture. It does so because it metaphorically relates the journey of the subject into the realm of signification, the submission to the law of the signifier. As Freud recounts it, the brothers revolt in order to take the father's place and enjoy the women for themselves, but what results from

their revolt is not really a substantial change. The prohibition laid down by the father remains intact even after his death—or worse, his death strengthens the prohibition. Freud claims, "Each single one of the brothers who had banded together for the purpose of killing their father was inspired by a wish to become like him and had given expression to it by incorporating parts of their father's surrogate in the totem meal. But, in consequence of the pressure exercised upon each participant by the fraternal clan as a whole, that wish could not be fulfilled. For the future no one could or might ever again attain the father's supreme power, even though that was what all of them had striven for."[7] Though the brothers do not attain their father's enjoyment through the revolt, an important change occurs that Freud glosses over. The brothers act in a way that changes the nature of the social order and of their being as subjects. Though they continue to endure the effects of prohibition, this prohibition becomes psychic rather than external. Though they cannot access the ultimate enjoyment of the father, they can find fragments of this enjoyment in their social existence. They exchange the envy of the Other's complete enjoyment for their fragmentary version of it. Their rupture frees them from a law imposed from without and begins an epoch in which subjects impose the law on themselves, an epoch that leads to the discovery of freedom through the Kantian moral law.

If we understand the parricide in this way, Freud's explanation for the totem meal must be modified. Though he is undoubtedly correct to claim that the totem meal repeats the initial crime, what he misses is the nature of the solidarity that the meal establishes. By repeating the initial crime, the totem meal allows subjects to experience the solidarity of the rupture, the solidarity that comes in the act of breaking from the despotic rule of the father. This is a solidarity attached to trauma because it arrives at a moment when the subject loses its social and symbolic bearings. In the act of revolting against the father, the brothers give up their identity as members of the horde completely, and if they fail, they would be reduced to nothing. In the act of revolt, one risks this nothingness, and in the totem meal, one repeats the act. It is the only basis of an authentic bond, the only basis of solidarity. Only those who give up everything in the rupture can accomplish it. And even they have difficulty sustaining it.

The pseudosolidarity that derives from guilt represents a retreat from the solidarity of the rupture. Guilt functions as a respite because it allows the subjects to avoid the groundlessness of the parricide itself. One is always guilty from within the law, while the parricide—or whatever form of rupture—places the law in suspense.[8] The solidarity of guilt is solidarity organized around the missing father, which is why Freud proclaims

that for the guilty sons "the dead father became stronger than the living one had been."[9] This is the case, however, only insofar as they do not remain within the rupture and instead attempt to constitute an identity that would allow for its repression. This action is what empowers the dead father. There is solidarity in the rupture, but there is no paternity.

Neither Greek nor Jew

When Freud is critical of religious solidarity, the primary form that he has in mind is the Christian one. But it is possible to see within Christianity, especially in the version that Paul creates of it, a solidarity that does not require an enemy. On the face of it, this is a bizarre claim, since Paul, much more than Christ, emphasizes the militancy of Christianity against sin and the sinful. Paul receives the lion's share of the blame for Christianity's crimes in Friedrich Nietzsche's *Anti-Christ.* Though Christ is the ostensible target of this screed, he comes off much better than Paul in the process. Christ is the one true Christian, according to Nietzsche, while "Paul was the greatest of all apostles of revenge."[10] Nietzsche's judgment is not idiosyncratic. Most historians and philosophers of Christianity see Paul as someone who relies prominently on the external enemy.

Despite this tendency in Paul's thought, he does theorize another form of Christian solidarity, even if he doesn't always remain true to it. This explains, we contend, the incredible theoretical renaissance that Paul has had in recent years. Nietzsche's dismissal of Paul as the first of the envious Christian priests has given way to several attempts to redeem Paul as a thinker. Paul has become in large part Lenin to Christ's Marx. He theorizes the act of Christ and thus becomes perhaps even more important. This is certainly the view of Alain Badiou, whose book on Paul played a central role in Paul's renewed philosophical importance. This wave of theoretical reclamations of Paul includes Giorgio Agamben's *The Time That Remains* and Slavoj Žižek's *The Puppet and the Dwarf,* along with the English translation of Jacob Taubes's *The Political Theology of Paul,* originally published posthumously in German in 1993. Paul becomes theoretically valuable today for a variety of reasons, but our claim is that his reimagining of solidarity in a way that evades the Freudian critique provides the most compelling solution to the enigma of his restored philosophical legitimacy.

Paul's Christian solidarity, which would centuries later be adopted by Marxism, originates not from opposition to an external persecuting force but to the natural life that the Christian has abandoned.[11] As Paul con-

ceives it, Christianity demands a rupture from everyday life, a rupture from living under the law, and a rupture from one's previous self. Christianity is open to everyone—"there is neither Jew nor Greek" (Galatians 3:28)—because every Christian leaves behind all markers of symbolic identity in the decisive break that occurs when one becomes a Christian.

As Paul conceives it, the conversion to Christianity completely reorients the subject's being, and this reorientation obliterates the distinctions rooted in social identity and the law. Paul envisions a form of salvation that involves a complete break from the social order as such. For some, this obliteration is tantamount to an attack on different discrete identities, a masked attempt to force assimilation. Though he finds something salutary in Paul, Jonathan Boyarin, for instance, sees the obliteration of extant social identities as depriving "those who have historically grounded identities" rooted in specific discursive and material traditions of "the 'right' of the group to actually exist" as different.[12] In *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism,* however, Alain Badiou makes clear Paul's status as a revolutionary. He says, "Paul's project is to show that a universal logic of salvation cannot be reconciled with any law, be it one that ties thought to the cosmos, or one that fixes the effects of an exceptional election."[13] Paul can open Christianity to all regardless of their particular identity because there is no law of Christianity. It is instead the rejection of law, the rupture with the dictates of law for the sake of love.

This love—or solidarity—does not exist in the established community of believers.[14] Whenever such a community establishes itself, Freud could predict the result: the community finds an external enemy to bond it together and is nonetheless torn apart by envy. Once one forms a community, one has already abandoned the possibility for solidarity, which, as Paul recognizes, is located in the break from the law and its dictates. The challenge for Paul and for Christianity is to remain within the break without falling back into the security of the law or pushing forward to a new fully realized identity. This is one way that we might read his famous statement from Galatians that "there is neither Jew nor Greek" in Christ. To be a Jew, in this sense, would be to fall back into the security of the law, while to be a Greek would be to achieve a fully realized identity beyond the law. In order to sustain solidarity with other Christians, the Christian must remain within the trauma of subjectivity itself.

In his reading of Saint Paul's Epistle to the Romans, Giorgio Agamben theorizes the Christian task in a similar way using slightly different terms. His ultimate goal, however, is to link the Christian revolution with the Marxist one. To do so, one must locate the people as the remnant. He claims, "The people is neither the all nor the part, neither the majority nor

the minority. Instead, it is that which can never coincide with itself, as all or as part, that which infinitely remains or resists in each division, and, with all due respect to those who govern us, never allows us to be reduced to a majority or a minority. This remnant is the figure, or the substantiality assumed by a people in a decisive moment, and as such is the only real political subject."[15] The people achieve political solidarity only as a remnant—that is, only as what remains in the division itself. Here, Agamben articulates in a precise way the consequences of the politics of rupture. Only in the rupture do the people exist in solidarity with one another.

Christianity provides the pattern for the formation of the people's solidarity in communism. This solidarity does not derive from the bourgeoisie as the common enemy or from the socialist society as the common goal. It comes instead from the moment at which the members of the working class lose their support within the capitalist order. This loss is the moment at which working-class solidarity forms. Along these lines, Agamben claims, "Just as he who is called is crucified with the Messiah and dies to the old world (Rom. 6:6) in order to be resuscitated to a new life (Rom. 8:11), so too is the proletariat only able to liberate itself through autosuppression. The 'complete loss' of man coincides with his complete redemption."[16] The proletarian revolt occurs through the "complete loss" of the identity that grounds the workers' being. The workers come together in solidarity through what they have given up, not through what they hope to attain. For this reason, every revolution is traumatic for the revolutionaries themselves as much as for the established order.

Like Christianity, Marxism has a terminological distinction for indicating the emergence of solidarity. Contra Freud, the bond among the proletariat comes not from sustaining outsiders who can be hated or killed. As with Christianity, it comes instead from the transition from the life lived in sin to the life lived in Christ—or, more properly, from the working class to the proletariat. Whereas the working class is an objective entity that fills an assigned place within capitalist relations of production, the proletariat is a subject engaged in struggling for its emancipation. But the vehicle for the solidarity of the proletariat is not struggle against a shared enemy or toward a shared goal. The proletariat's solidarity does not derive from its position as the subject-object of history.[17] It is rather the shared transformation from working class to proletariat that transforms the workers into a people. In this rupture, the subjects are bonded together as they break from the roles that capitalist society had assigned to them and change the determinations of their existence.

The danger residing in both Christianity and Marxism is not that they will become stable doctrines and lose touch with the questioning that

characterizes their initial incarnations. For philosophers like Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida, this is the threat that assails every movement: it will lose touch with the movement of thought and ossify as a doctrine present at hand that one can learn.[18] This is not where we locate the danger. The threat to Christianity and Marxism resides in their tendency to abandon the rupture that constitutes them. Christianity and Marxism emerge from rupture and this rupture creates their solidarity, but sustaining it requires sustaining the trauma of having a ruptured identity. This is why the turn away from subjectivity itself to an identity as a Christian or as a Marxist has such an appeal. But this turn is a disaster for both Christianity and Marxism; it leads one in the direction of fundamentalism and the other toward the killing fields. When the abandonment of rupture occurs, both Christians and Marxists must rely on external enemies to achieve the solidarity that they require, and in this way they become the mirror image of the world that they struggle against.

If Christianity under Catholicism in the Middle Ages became a force of imperial war making, this is the direct result of the loss of any authentic Christian solidarity. And if the Soviet Union became simply a different version of state monopoly capitalism, this is the consequence of its abandonment of the solidarity of the revolution. In each case, the trauma of the rupture gave way to a redemptive identity that repressed any connection with the complete loss that inaugurated solidarity. There is no time limit on rupture: its capacity for producing solidarity can extend infinitely. But one must remain in touch with it.[19]

Everyone claims to want solidarity, but few want to pay the price for it. It does not require the hatred of an enemy or the willingness to kill for the collective but the self-inflicted violence of the rupture. The solidarity that forms in the rupture is a solidarity without ground because the bond that exists is nothing but the shared absence of ground. What holds us together as a group is our break from the security of an established identity. Throughout human history, solidarity has developed in family units, clans, tribes, and even nation-states. But the dream of human solidarity remains almost unthinkable. If it is, this is because we cannot imagine existing within the trauma of rupture without the respite of some form of identity.

Our Friends and Neighbors

Solidarity is not difficult to sustain because the bond with others lacks love but because it involves love. Though desire always founders and

remains unsatisfied, love finds the object that desire misses, and it embraces this object. If solidarity could remain within the logic of desire, it would avoid the pitfalls that come when the subject encounters the privileged object in the other. This encounter occurs in the rupture, where subjects engage one another without the guises of symbolic identity that can arouse one another's desire. The key to understanding the difficulty of solidarity is in the distinction between desire and love.

What catalyzes the subject's desire for the other is not the other's love, but his or her privileged object—a trait or feature attributed to the other and experienced as the source of the other's seductive or erotic power. According to Jacques Lacan (who calls this privileged object the *objet petit a*), it is "in you more than you." The privileged object has no empirical status but nonetheless defines the other's being for the subject. The privileged object is the other's secret—a certain "it" that gives the other an alluring sheen, the thing the subject wants to possess and to know. The privileged object, in short, is the promise that sex will bring about such knowledge and possession, that sex will accomplish the impossible—that it will cause to emerge what is missing insofar as it is missing. For psychoanalysis, however, the privileged object is a very paradoxical entity, since it is something that the other does not really have in any straightforward sense. The other's privileged object is in fact the other's lost object, an object that the other has only insofar as it has been lost.[20]

Lacan's hyphenated definition of this object as the object-cause of desire conveys something of its paradoxical status: on the one hand, the privileged object can be seen and talked about as an empirically recognizable object, something the subject might meaningfully experience and be enticed by—for instance, the other's eyes or laugh or walk. On the other hand, however, as the cause of the subject's desire, the privileged object is a kind of mirage, existing as the material index of an empty place in the topography of the subject's psychic constitution. Even though the other's object may seem like something whose intrinsic features genuinely and spontaneously capture the subject's desire, the privileged object of the other is always an imposter, an entity occupying the psychic space cleared by the division constitutive of subjectivity that turns the subject into a sexed being. This is the case because the privileged object emerges only at the moment at which a signifier comes to name and thereby take the place of the source of ultimate fulfillment the subject believes itself to have once enjoyed.[21] In short, the privileged object is the cause of desire and nothing more, that is to say, is the cause of *nothing but desire*. The problem with this object is that when we experience it directly its nothingness comes into full view: what seemed like an attractive personality trait, for

instance, becomes a grating habit that goes on without stopping. Solidarity is unthinkable without the subject's relation to this object in the other.

This quality of the other's privileged object can be seen when we glimpse it, unexpectedly, in a place or for a duration that robs it of its gloss. We might consider any number of examples here: the moment in David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986) when Dorothy Vallens (Isabella Rosselini) emerges without clothes on a front lawn in the middle of a small town, interrupting what would be a fight over Sandy Williams (Laura Dern) between Jeffrey Beaumont (Kyle MacLachlan) and Mike (Ken Stovitz); the scene in Robert Altman's *Short Cuts* (1993) in which Marian Wyman (Julianne Moore) stands for several minutes without pants or underwear in front of her husband, Ralph (Matthew Modine); or the uncomfortable scene of sexual coupling in Bruno Dumont's *L'humanité* (1999). All these images of a noneroticized privileged object are difficult to watch, since they confront us with the way that this object only materializes a void, the way it makes us aware of a void in the very occupation of it.[22] This paradoxical occupation wherein an object occupies a void without thereby abolishing it is what establishes the privileged object as the excess or surplus that is the sine qua non of a properly human sexuality.

To call this object an excess or surplus is to signal that beneath its ostensible status as enticement to desire lies its real status as enjoyment—that aspect of the other that cannot be known or possessed.[23] While this aspect can be encountered in many venues, we can find it most readily in the act of sex, where, despite the idealizations that underwrite our imaginings and representations and even our performances of this act, the privileged object in its real (or excessive) dimension is always present. What the manifestation of the privileged object in sex means is that the subject cannot find or seal the other's love in the act of coupling for the simple reason that in sex, subject and other do not find in each other that which each lacks. They meet instead what is excessive in each other, what Molly Rothenberg calls "the *excess* of signification that irremediably adheres to the *subject* as signifier."[24] The function of the other's privileged object in the act of sex, then, would appear to be to announce an insuperable alterity—that is, an enjoyment which cannot be a sign of love since it signifies nothing beyond itself.

The inevitable diminishment of the other's privileged object is ultimately what permits the order of love proper to emerge. It is also the basis for solidarity, since solidarity is finally just an expression of love. Love, we could say, is the name for what can appear in the space opened up by the banality of the privileged object. Alain Badiou perhaps puts this best when he claims that love enters the "defile of desire but love *does not have the object of desire as a cause.*"[25] In Badiou's marvelous formulation, "love passes through desire like a camel through the eye of a needle."[26] What Badiou suggests here is that love is made possible only by the paradoxical status of the privileged object—by the way, as the sexual object par excellence, it has a sexualized charge but can also appear entirely drained of that charge as a contingent biological entity. This is why Badiou can claim "that it is not *the same body* that love and desire treat even though it is exactly 'the same.' "[27] The other's body animated by the imaginary privileged object is the desired body, whereas the other's body displaying the real privileged object is the loved body. Love is thus paradoxically that which is made possible by a confrontation with something *un*desirable, with something by which one's heart can never be stirred or with which one does not magically or spontaneously "fall in love."

The undesirable object is the one that we must confront in the rupture that produces solidarity. In our everyday interactions, the other's object remains hidden and thus continues to be desirable. But when rupture occurs and no symbolic identity exists to mask the object, it appears in all its undesirability, and it is exactly with this form of the object that the subject must express its solidarity. In the rupture, the other is nothing but its object or its mode of enjoying itself, and this enjoyment forces the subject to abandon all the guarantees of reciprocity. By opting for the solidarity of the rupture, one loves the other's privileged object, even though this object necessarily throws one out of joint. Rather than envying the other's enjoyment, one identifies with it.

Alone Together in an Empty Park

We can see an expression of the trauma involved in solidarity in Todd Field's *Little Children* (2006), which explores in an exemplary way the role that the love of the other's privileged object plays in the formation of solidarity. For much of Field's film, we are invited to see a kind of political rebellion in the sexual relationship at its center—an adulterous affair between Sarah (Kate Winslet), a stay-at-home mother, who in college was transformed by critical gender studies but who now finds herself in a traditional marriage, and Brad (Patrick Wilson), a stay-at-home father who has twice failed the bar exam. They form a kind of political solidarity in the face of the oppressiveness of the other denizens of suburbia. Though the film depicts solidarity as appealing, it remains the Freudian version and not yet Christian-style solidarity.

The political valence of the affair is established in *Little Children*'s opening scene, in which, on a suburban playground, Sarah stages their first kiss for the benefit of the Right-leaning "supermoms" with whom she gathers—women who drive SUVs, listen to conservative talk radio, parent autocratically according to strict timetables, and who react with predictable moralistic outrage, even though they have seen Brad on the playground before, have dubbed him the prom king for his good looks, and have spent a great deal of time fantasizing about him.[28] Following the playground kiss, the political dimension of Sarah and Brad's adultery grows even stronger. Sarah purchases a red bikini to wear in Brad's presence at the town's swimming pool—a purchase she explicitly conceives of as a kind of political act.[29] And Brad is reminded of the world foreclosed by conjugal commitment—a world in which sex hadn't yet become a routine. Via his amorous affair with Sarah, Brad also gets free of the surveillance of his wife, Kathy (Jennifer Connelly), a glimpse of which we see in the way the latter circles with a red marker various purchases of Brad's that appear on their credit card, questioning their necessity.

Their first sexual encounter, which takes place atop Sarah's washing machine, is catalyzed by Brad entering Sarah's study—the one book-filled "room of her own" in Sarah's enormous and immaculately formal colonial house—and happening upon Sarah's copy of Shakespeare's sonnets, bookmarked at Sonnet 147 with its first line underscored: "My love is like a fever." And in the midst of the affair, Sarah is invited to a neighborhood book club that just happens to be discussing Gustav Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. There, she is able to speak directly to the question of adultery's political salience, claiming that there is something "beautiful and heroic in [Emma's] rebellion," in her "hunger for an alternative," in her "refusal to accept unhappiness."

The film's ostensible endorsement of Sarah and Brad's solidarity is only strengthened by the two other portraits of pathological sexual behavior with which it is juxtaposed. The first of these involves Sarah's husband, Richard (Gregg Edelman), whose work-related inquiry into Y2K lands him accidentally on the website of SluttyKay.com, which displays thousands of pictures of a woman "with a thing for kitchen utensils, spatulas, and dressing up like a little girl and playing with balloons." Richard's fascination with these images becomes a kind of obsession. The reasons for this are easy to discern, since Slutty Kay is the fantasy of a sexuality unshackled from any tether. Indeed, the world of Slutty Kay is one teeming with privileged objects: every place or object, every quotidian phenomenon, is eroticized as the object-cause of her desire. The photos clearly catalyze Richard's desire for Slutty Kay, and yet he cannot shake

that they are, in fact, just simulations. This leads him to an online purchase more perverse than Sarah's action—of a pair of Slutty Kay's thong panties, which, in the film's defining image of him, he adorns over his face in the act of masturbating to digital images of her.

The second portrait of perverse sexuality in *Little Children* is the pedophilia of Ronald James McGorvey (Jackie Earle Haley), who, released from prison, has moved back into the community, into his mother's home, triggering the formation of a committee of concerned citizens whose aim is to remove him. At the head of this group is Brad's friend, Larry Hedges (Noah Emmerich), who announces in no uncertain terms that there is a "pervert in our midst"—a source of evil from which the children of the community must be protected and saved—and who entertains the notion that people like McGorvey should be castrated. In many ways, McGorvey makes for an interesting comparison with Slutty Kay (as Richard encounters her), since both blur the line between childhood and adulthood.

But whereas Slutty Kay (and Richard, too) is quite cognizant of the symbolic law that marks this threshold, selling titillation in the reclamation of objects and milieus desexualized by it, McGorvey aims rather to get this law to show itself. Whereas Slutty Kay plays at being a child in order to steal some enjoyment back from the law that prohibits it, and is able to do so, harmlessly enough, with a very small set of admirers, McGorvey *is* still partly a child—a figure whom we see addressing his mother, May (Phyllis Somerville), as "Mommy," reveling in her enumeration of his charms and in her inexorable conviction that, no matter what he has done, he is a "nice person." What McGorvey seeks in children, then, is decidedly not their privileged object, since for him children do not yet even have such an object and are not yet the bearers of an enjoyment that is properly sexual. If Richard puts Slutty Kay's panties over his face in order momentarily to incorporate, as part of his own body, her privileged object (the secret of her sexual allure), McGorvey puts a mask over his face at the town's swimming pool so as to *be* the object that might get the other's desire to emerge as law. Despite his protestations to the contrary—that he had just wanted a swim to cool off—we should see his identification and removal from the pool as delivering to him a covert satisfaction.

Having presented both the image of the suburban playground peopled by mothers and their children, the adulterous affair between Sarah and Brad, and the images of perverse sexuality in Richard and McGorvey, *Little Children*'s political terrain should be clear. That is to say, Sarah and Brad's affair would appear to exist in between two pathologies—on the one hand, the right-wing fantasy of suburbia as a space of love without sex, a space of law and order and marriage and family, sealed off from

anything that interrupts its idyll, and, on the other, the perverse worlds inhabited by Richard and McGorvey, worlds, we could say, of sex without love, where the overabundance of sexual enjoyment prevents anything like loving relationships to establish themselves. What Sarah and Brad's affair promises is to forge a world of love *and* sex, breaking open the borders of suburbia without descending into the perverse worlds of Richard and McGorvey. It seems to be a model of political solidarity in the form of love—a love that challenges social norms without perversely attempting to arouse the law. At a certain point, however, *Little Chidren* radically questions the bona fides of this promise and the extent to which this love that aims at completion in the other opens anything. Indeed, it is fair to say that Field shows us how this form of love belongs to a psychic strategy set at evading the baldness of the privileged object. This form of love forsakes in the process the chance for solidarity that comes with embracing the privileged object as incomplete.

The decisive scene in which this is made unmistakably clear comes at the local high school football stadium, where Brad, having been made a part of Larry's night touch football team, the Guardians, leads his team to victory in front of one adoring fan—Sarah. In Field's presentation of it, this scene has all the features of myth—from the opening long shot of the American flag, to the drum and fife of the nondiegetic score, to the poetic voice-over narration of Will Lyman (from the PBS television show *Frontline*) doing his best NFL Films impersonation, to the David-beats-Goliath nature of the contest (in which the winless Guardians take on the Controllers, "a group of young hotshots from the financial district"), to the increased frame rate as Brad runs for the winning score. After scoring, the nondiegetic music ceases and the diegetic sound consists exclusively of Sarah, standing near the top of the bleachers cheering. To cement this romantic fantasy, Field cuts to the two of them lying in the end zone kissing, during which they hatch their plan to run away together. What Field portrays here is solidarity established on the basis of a mythical future satisfaction, on the fantasy of a reciprocal filling out of each other's lack.

Little Children refuses, in a striking way, to deliver on this fantasy. That is, Field sees that this type of solidarity must fail, and in that failure hints at how we can love in ways that belong to the solidarity of rupture. This is clear in *Little Children*'s final scene, which returns us to the site where the film began—the suburban playground, which is to be the place where Sarah and Brad are to meet. Sarah turns up at the playground with Lucy (Sadie Goldstein), her daughter, at the agreed-upon time, but Brad, though he intends to show up—we see him packing a bag and even going as far as to leave an explanatory note under his wife's pillow—fails to

appear. This failed rendezvous functions as a kind of opening into which others can step. In a sense, Brad's failure to turn up creates or highlights the disjunction between them that their plan to run away had disavowed. In a sense, we could say that Sarah and Brad are most authentically a couple in the several moments during which an anxious Sarah waits for him. For this couple to sustain itself, a different Brad would probably have to appear—not Brad as the bearer of the imaginary privileged object, the harbinger of romantic completeness, but Brad as the bearer of the real privileged object, the material occupant of a void.

That Field is interested in producing an encounter with the real privileged object is made clear by who turns up at the playground in lieu of Brad. On the cusp of producing the romantic couple, Field produces the real privileged object instead: as Sarah pushes her daughter on the swing, she hears the playground gate open and turns to see McGorvey enter. Tightening at first, Sarah momentarily sees McGorvey as dangerous; gradually discerning that he is sobbing, she elects to approach him, asking him if he needs help. He tells her that his mother has died, but then Sarah realizes that Lucy is missing. Frantic, Sarah calls out for Lucy and ends up finding her out in the street, gazing up at a swarm of flies drawn to the heat of a streetlight—just the sort of contingent natural phenomenon that can capture the desire of a child. Scooping her up, she carries her back to the car and, showing her some affection for the first time, appears to realize that Lucy is not the impediment to her satisfaction but something she must choose to love. Were the film to end here, its politics would culminate in a salutary vision of elective maternal love. But *Little Children* goes further.

When Sarah leaves, her place, in the film, is taken by Larry Hedges, who, as he approaches McGorvey, sees the latter's self-castration. McGorvey's act here is a significantly disarming one, and it has the effect of turning McGorvey into a neighbor of sorts capable of being loved.[30] This is the case because Larry's belief in castration—as a remedy for the "evil" that McGorvey represents—paradoxically makes McGorvey's privileged object (his phallus) the object-cause of Larry's desire, the thing which, if taken, might bring about a harmoniously idyllic suburban lifeworld. When Larry confronts this phallus *as castrated*, it ceases to have this status. Larry is thus faced with the possibility of executing an act that is a gesture of genuine solidarity. Scooping up McGorvey, Larry cradles him and takes him to the hospital, announcing that he (Larry) will not let anything happen to him.

In the end, then, *Little Children* flirts with but refuses to produce the standard romantic couple produced in countless Hollywood films. In

Commonwealth, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri complain about the role that the family and the couple have in monopolizing the space for solidarity in the contemporary landscape. They say, "The family functions in the social imaginary as the sole paradigm for relationships of intimacy and solidarity, eclipsing and usurping all other possible forms."[31] It is to the credit of *Little Children* that it turns to another form of solidarity in its conclusion—exactly the moment when Hollywood typically affirms the romantic bond at the expense of all others. In the place of this couple, it produces two different kinds of couples, the outcome of opting for rupture—between mother and daughter, between ex–police officer and registered sex offender—that are catalyzed by an encounter with the banality of the other's privileged object. The solidarity between the self-castrated sex offender and his chief persecutor captures the trauma involved with the solidarity of rupture. Larry must not simply love the man he has previously despised but also must love him insofar as he lacks even the object of Larry's former disgust.

In the voice-over accompanying the film's final frames, the narrator claims that changing the past is impossible but that "the future can be a different story, and it had to start somewhere." What this story might entail is difficult to say, but its beginning rests on Sarah's and Larry's decisions—on their (and our) capacity to love something that is the material marker of emptiness. This perhaps explains the film's final shot of the place where the film began—the playground—now hauntingly empty. However it might be filled in the future, if the future can be a different story, it will always, and at the same time, be empty. All solidarity occurs within a fundamental emptiness.

Shakespeare in Exile

When we think of the formation of solidarity in Shakespeare's comedies, we probably think first of the romantic unions that always form at the end of the plays between men and women. Seemingly intractable antagonisms between characters become miraculously resolved in the concluding turn to marriage, which typically involves multiple couples. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* for example, Hermia is able to overcome her father's disdain for Lysander and win the latter as a marriage partner. In *All's Well That Ends Well,* the barrier is even more extreme: Helen must win the love of Bertram, who genuinely detests her throughout the play. In the end, however, the solidarity of the couple triumphs, and Shakespeare

links this isolated form of solidarity with the triumph over antagonism rather than with its emergence.

The identification of solidarity with the triumph over antagonism reaches its apex in *The Merchant of Venice.* Here, not only must Bassanio overcome the barriers that separate him from Portia, but also their bond requires the ostracism of Shylock, who has attempted to extract a pound of flesh from Antonio, the play's titular character. With its depiction of the exile of Shylock, *The Merchant of Venice* makes explicit the logic of the solidarity that occurs at the end of Shakespeare's comedies. This solidarity overcomes internal antagonism and then excludes someone from the community of love in order to complete that community. The solidarity of the romantic couple and the group of friends at the end of Shakespeare's comedies conspicuously avoids any connection with rupture by envisioning its overcoming and exile.

The focus at the end of *As You Like It* follows that of the other comedies. In fact, the amount of coupling is so extreme that the cynical character Jaques jokes that there must be another flood on the way with everyone headed two by two to the ark.[32] But despite this turn to the romantic union at the conclusion of the play, *As You Like It* also illustrates a very different form of solidarity, a solidarity that cannot be reduced to the couple or the family but which exists through uprooting familial bonds. This comedy makes clear that solidarity forms when one breaks natural or traditional bonds, not when one adheres to them. We experience solidarity insofar as we lose our status within the legal order and become outcasts.

As You Like It dramatizes the aftermath of the banishment of Duke Senior from his kingdom by his brother, Duke Frederick, and in this aftermath we see another character alienated from his brother, Orlando, pursuing and finally marrying the former duke's daughter, Rosalind. There are two key moments where solidarity emerges in *As You Like It.* One is a bond of friendship that gains strength through the rejection of familial ties, and the other is a collectivity that forms through exile and around a banished leader. The play begins with the banishment of Duke Senior to the forest of Arden by his brother, Duke Frederick. Though Frederick's daughter, Rosalind, opts to stay behind with her cousin and best friend, Celia, Frederick eventually decides to include Rosalind in her father's banishment. For the play's villain, Duke Frederick, the familial tie of Rosalind and her father trumps her decision to remain with him and his daughter, Celia. Frederick's banishment of Rosalind, however, has the effect of cementing the bond between Rosalind and Celia and prompting Celia to

betray her father in order to remain with Rosalind. Shakespeare reveals that the bond of solidarity has the ability to override the familial bond.

When the duke lays down the decree of banishment, Celia identifies herself as its target in order to affirm her solidarity with Rosalind. When Rosalind points out the empirical fact that Celia has actually not been banished, her friend balks. For Celia, this view indicates that "Rosalind lacks then the love / Which teachest thee that thou and I am one. / Shall we be sund'red? shall we part, sweet girl? / No, let my father seek another heir."[33] Though Celia and Rosalind were close prior to Rosalind's banishment by Celia's father, this act tightens the bond between them. Celia identifies herself with Rosalind not through any positive characteristic but through the latter's banishment. The duke's act of rejecting Rosalind expels her from the legal order, and this negation creates a point with which his daughter can identify in order to simultaneously break her familial bond with him and express her solidarity with Rosalind.

Duke Frederick's initial banishment of Rosalind's father creates an even more expansive image of solidarity. Though life as an exile in the forest of Arden is difficult, Duke Senior prefers it to life at court, and his banishment there attracts rather than repels followers. Describing the situation early in the play, an ally of Duke Frederick relates, "They say he is already in the forest of Arden and a many merry men with him; and there they live like the old Robin Hood of England. They say many young gentlemen flock to him every day, and fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world."[34] Men who did not come to Duke Senior when he was in power join him at the moment when his brother strips him of power. They connect with the duke through the mediation of his banishment.

The sense of solidarity surrounding the exiled duke becomes even more pronounced when Orlando comes upon the duke and his followers and demands their food. Though Orlando draws his weapon and threatens violence, no one among the duke's group responds aggressively. Instead, Duke Senior invites Orlando to eat with them and tells him that there is no need for force. This reaction shocks Orlando, and he points out the contrast between the terrible conditions in which the group lives and their welcoming response to him. But it is the banishment itself and the group's decision to reside in the rupture of the banishment that engenders this response. Because they exist within the moment of exile, Duke Senior and his followers are not defending their territory or their position. Instead, they can view others as fellow beings of exile.[35]

Exile from the legal order itself doesn't ipso facto produce solidarity. There are many exiles who decide to force their way back into the state

or retreat into a private enclave. But those who decide to sustain the moment of exile as such—those who embrace their ostracism from the legal order—in this way achieve the solidarity that rupture produces. The position of exile itself does not create the bond. It is how the exiles relate to their exile. Duke Senior and his followers are welcoming to all who encounter them because they fully take up their exile. They allow exile to define them without seeking to restore their former identity.

Though Duke Frederick's acts of exiling both his brother, Duke Senior, and his niece, Rosalind, provide the vehicle for the establishment of solidarity in the play, he himself plays a negligible role, appearing briefly in only four scenes and affecting the conclusion only insofar as he retreats from public life and figures as an absence. Frederick's relative absence leaves the play without a strong villain and focuses our attention on the rupture that Frederick creates rather than on Frederick himself. Solidarity forms around Rosalind's loss of her position and around Duke Senior's loss of his kingdom. This solidarity is unlike the bonds that form around power or status. It does not serve the self-interest of those who take it up but rather threatens or even damages their interest. By joining Rosalind in exile, Celia loses her position among the nobility of the kingdom and puts her life in danger by heading to the forest of Arden. This loss is appealing because at the same time that it bonds Celia to her friend it also frees her from her social identity and obligations. The solidarity gained through rupture is not social but forms through setting social identity aside. This is why solidarity is both dangerous and alluring. Those who achieve solidarity do so by putting aside the bonds that are most precious to them in order to discover a new form of bond that will always remain tenuous but which offers an enjoyment not to be found within the confines of any social identity.

Putting on the Yellow Star

When one chronicles the great moments of solidarity throughout human history, the times when it coalesced around an enemy are more numerous and more substantial than those when it was located in rupture. It is not always easy to see the distinction between the two forms: what appears first as the solidarity of rupture can become solidarity against an enemy and vice versa. Often, the two forms blend together. The bond among the Jacobins in the French Revolution was the product of their rupture with the authority of the ancien régime, but they also fell victim to the need for an enemy, as becomes evident with the Committee of Public Safety's

decision to execute Georges Danton. Jacobin solidarity oscillates between the two forms.

Moments of the solidarity of rupture become clearest when those in a secure political position identify themselves with those who are politically ostracized. One affirms solidarity by abandoning one's identity within the social structure to identify with those excluded by it. In extreme cases, these acts of solidarity involve sacrificing one's life in order to express solidarity with those who are to be killed, but this degree of heroism is not required. A political position that demanded this kind of sacrifice would have the life span of Shakerism. There are other instances where the show of solidarity represents only a psychic threat and a loss of identity rather than life.

One of the great examples of the solidarity of rupture is the act of a famous writer of children's books. After the Nazi conquest of Poland, the celebrity of Polish author Janusz Korczak provided him many opportunities to escape from the fate that awaited the 192 Jewish children who resided at his orphanage located in the Warsaw ghetto. But at every turn, Korczak refused to abandon his children. In July 1942, on the eve of the Warsaw ghetto's liquidation, allies of Korczak organized for him an escape—a false identity card and a room outside the ghetto in which to hide. When his friend from outside the ghetto, Igor Newerly, came to fetch Korczak, the latter "looked at me as though disappointed in me, as though I had proposed a betrayal or an embezzlement."[36] On August 5, 1942, Korczak marched off with his children, to be transported by train and gassed in Treblinka. Korczak's solidarity with the children spared them some of the horror of their impending death. He organized a final march as the Nazis came to take them away, and this march allowed them to remain calm. Adir Cohen reports that "a German officer who had read Korczak's book, *Little Jack,* wished to allow him to get off the death wagon, but Korczak refused and returned to his children."[37] Korczak's refusal to leave the children was simultaneously a refusal to take refuge in the position of the famous writer, of the authority with the capacity to order the breaking up of his boarding school, which might then potentially save a handful of his charges and himself. Refusing to choose in ways that belong already to the situation, he sacrificed the benefits of his fame in order to express his solidarity with those who had no fame to save them.

The horror of the Holocaust did not produce only heroes like Janusz Korczak. It also produced legends of heroism driven by the desire for a heroism that would have been equal to the event itself. This is the case with the enduring legend of the Danish response to the German occupation of Denmark during World War II. According to this legend, the Germans demanded that Danish Jews wear the yellow Star of David, and a large percentage of Danes, including King Christian X, put on the yellow star themselves in an act of solidarity. Despite the falsity of this legend and despite the many efforts to debunk it, it persists, in part because people desire stories of resistance but in part because it metaphorically portrays the truth of the Danish response to Nazism.

Unlike countries such as France that readily turned over Jews to be gassed or Romania that pursued Jews with a violence that discomfited even the Nazis, the Danes saved an incredible percentage of Danish Jews. The Danes saved over 7,200 Jews out of a total population of 7,800 by transporting them to safety in Sweden. This act required the cooperation of many ordinary Danes who were willing to put their own lives at risk to help save Jews. As Samuel Abrahamsen notes, "In retrospect it seems almost incredible that peace-loving and easy-going Danes would change overnight from law-abiding citizens to become underground fighters, who would live under false names and addresses, constantly moving from one hiding place to another and using false identification cards to risk their lives to save their fellow Danes."[38] By helping Jews escape deportation and certain death, these Danes transformed what it meant to be a Dane. Danish identity was not at this moment an indication of inclusion but of exclusion. When the deportation order came, all Danes became Jews.

When Nazi leaders first issued the decree to round up the Danish Jews in early October of 1943, there was a spontaneous expression of solidarity.[39] Bishops spoke out publicly against the deportation order; universities closed down in an act of protest; and people from all walks of life conspired to save Jews. At the moment of the deportation order, Danes might have taken refuge in a Danish identity that did not include Jews—and certainly there were those who did so. But enough Danes identified themselves and identified being a Dane with the excluded part that the Jews were saved. The Danes did not spontaneously put on the yellow star in an act of solidarity with the Jews in response to Nazism, but they acted as if they had. Their solidarity was the product of a rupture with their own sense of belonging attached to being a Dane.

The most incredible dimension of the Danish reaction is that the Danes did not save only the citizens of Denmark. They also saved the stateless Jews in Denmark, the ones who never had a chance in other deportations. One can understand a nation saving those who belong to it, but the Danes saved even those who didn't belong. This is why Hannah Arendt claims, "The story of the Danish Jews is *sui generis,* and the behavior of the Danish people and their government was unique among all the countries of Europe—whether occupied, a partner of the Axis, or neutral and

truly independent. One is tempted to recommend the story as required reading in political science for all students who wish to learn something about the enormous power potential inherent in non-violent action and resistance to an opponent possessing vastly superior means of violence."[40] The Danish response to the Nazi deportation of the Jews did not stem from any specific tendency in Danish culture or society, which earns it the label sui generis from Arendt. It has its origin, instead, in fidelity to rupture, a fidelity possible for any culture or for any individual. Nothing determined who would save Jews and who would capitulate to the Nazi deportation. It was an equal opportunity.[41]

Even though the Danes who rescued the Jews did not go to their deaths, as Janusz Korczak did, they nonetheless put their lives at risk by opposing the dictates of the Nazi authorities. The act of solidarity through identification with the excluded can occur, however, with only a psychic risk, the risk of being associated with the excluded and losing one's status among the included. In a sense, this represents the ultimate sacrifice that solidarity requires. It is easier to heroically give up one's life than to voluntarily identify oneself with the excluded and thereby abandon one's identity. When the Danes identify themselves with the Jews and take part in their exclusion, they lose the privilege that Danish identity accords them. This loss is the essence of their heroism.

The identification with the excluded requires a break with the benefits of inclusion and exposes its illusory nature. Inclusion offers subjects a sense of identity, but this identity is not substantial: it depends on those left outside. By identifying with the excluded, the Danes break with the false bond of national identity and constitute an authentic one. Solidarity depends on the rupture from the exclusive group and the sense of inclusion that it provides. We find solidarity only on the outside, when we refuse to leave the children who are being sent to Treblinka or when we identify with the threatened Jews and help them to escape. Acts of solidarity depend on the abandonment of the security that comes from existing inside. We are united only insofar as we don't belong.

Chapter Four

Equality

The great modern critic of equality is Friedrich Nietzsche. Because Nietzsche locates value in separation, he views equality as the erasure of all value. One creates value by separating oneself from the masses and by going alone, and the idea of equality always brings one back to the level of the masses. As an equal among many, the subject loses the value that would distinguish it as an individual, and value exists only in this act of distinguishing, not in the collective. To see different individuals as equal even in terms of right or law is to commit a crime against them in the name of law. As he puts it in *Beyond Good and Evil,* "What is right for someone absolutely *cannot* be right for someone else."[1] Equating people not only suggests that their difference doesn't matter but also destroys the value that the act of separation creates.

Value gives life significance beyond mere survival, but no value is eternal. Life, for Nietzsche, acquires a value through the distinction that a rupture creates, and the idea of equality threatens this value by denying the existence of the rupture. Nietzsche warns so often against modern nihilism because he sees the possibility that modernity's promulgation of the idea of equality will produce a world completely bereft of value, in which survival will be the only way that anyone will be capable of relating to the world. It would not require an apocalyptic event, as in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road,* to reduce humanity to a collection of survivalists. Though mass cannibalism has not yet ensued (as it does in *The Road*), equality has succeeded, as Nietzsche sees it, in producing a world dominated by the last man, characterized by the absence of any value other than that of survival. Rather than risk his life for the sake of some value like honor, the last man abandons the will to power and preaches equality in order to ensure his safety.

Nietzsche's rejection of Christianity and socialism (which he sees as simply a derivative of the former) stems from his defense of value against

its destruction. By proposing that all are equal in Christ or as citizens of a socialist society, these doctrines render existence worthless and leave no value to guide living. In Nietzsche's philosophy, the proponents of equality want to impose their lack of value onto others, but this imposition does not occur in the form of a break or rupture. Equality is a degeneration rather than a rupture, and it cannot be a value in itself because it is the erasure of all value. Value requires separation, and equality eliminates its possibility.[2] In this sense, Nietzsche is the philosopher of the aristocratic rupture (while Hegel is the philosopher of the democratic rupture).

Interestingly, for Nietzsche, the villain in the drama of equality is not simply the radical democrat or the socialist. It is just as much a capitalist economy that imposes the law of the exchange on everything. Within this economy, all objects—and all subjects—have a price that can be calculated in terms of the market. Not only does capitalism reduce everything to an exchange value that allows it to be compared with everything else, but capitalism also constantly expands its reach. It abhors an outside, and this is where Nietzsche wants to reside.[3] Just as vehemently as he denounces the moralists who want to create a society of equals, Nietzsche declaims against this economic egalitarianism of capitalist society. This two-pronged critique allows for a Rightist and a Leftist deviation, and both develop in the twentieth century. Ayn Rand embodies the former, while Gilles Deleuze is the representative figure of the latter, though it is widespread throughout the philosophical world.

Rand attacks the idea of equality for submitting the productive few to the control of those who live off this productivity. In *Atlas Shrugged* (1957), she even envisions the productive few going on strike and isolating themselves from the rest of the population that would enforce equality on them. According to the novel, the productive few are the economic and intellectual elites, not those who actually perform productive labor.[4] Rand's inegalitarianism, like Nietzsche's, has its basis in an understanding of the violence that moral claims for equality ostensibly do to the individual.[5] In the name of morality, egalitarians destroy the engine of social production and thereby threaten to impoverish the lives of those they would help, which becomes evident when the truly productive few go on strike. Everyone suffers when the idea of equality restricts the fecundity of the elite.

Deleuze's concern for the damage that equality does comes from the opposite side of the political spectrum. Though he champions a Leftist politics and even a version of Marxism, he is not the typical Marxist. When communism leads to state control and the stabilization of identity, it must be opposed as vigorously as capitalism. As Deleuze (with Félix Guattari) defines it, the Leftist struggle is to sustain the activity of becoming against the stability of identity, and the idea of equality always stabilizes. Hence, rather than arguing for the equality of minorities within the social order, Deleuze and Guattari champion placing oneself on the side of the minority not as a stable identity but in its becoming. Minoritizing is a process that undermines the identitarian logic of the oppressive majority. In *A Thousand Plateaus,* they claim, "The problem is never to acquire the majority, even in order to install a new constant. There is no becoming-majoritarian; majority is never becoming. All becoming is minoritarian."[6] Embracing the idea of equality implies becoming a part of the majority and as a result ceasing to become. One becomes only in one's difference outside the domain of equals. Insofar as egalitarianism accepts the logic of the majority that eliminates the difference embodied in local (or molecular) acts of becoming, Deleuze views egalitarianism as incompatible with a genuinely Leftist politics.

Through Rand and Deleuze, we can see the persistence of Nietzsche's critique of equality in the twentieth century. These wildly opposed manifestations of antiequality show the danger associated with a value that almost everyone seems to take for granted today. Though they engage Nietzsche from contrary political positions, both Rand and Deleuze envision essentially the same threat. Like Nietzsche, they recognize how the idea of equality can eviscerate the singular values that make life worth living by processing those singularities through the defiles of a homogenizing structure. Rand is preoccupied by the singularity of those on the top of the structure, while Deleuze's concern is for those on the bottom or those exiled from it, but they do have this worry in common. Their thought shows that equality, as it has historically been conceived, carries with it perhaps insurmountable theoretical difficulties, especially if we want to avoid spiraling into a survivalist nihilism.

In order to sustain their particular versions of Nietzsche's philosophy, Rand and Deleuze each must omit some part of it. Rand blinds herself to the role that the structure of the capitalist economy has in producing the equality that she disdains. The capitalism of *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal,* a book that Rand cowrote with Alan Greenspan and others, is a capitalism of free competition in which the egalitarian effects of the exchange process do not make an appearance. Rand inveighs against liberals who would impinge on the capitalist's freedom with calls for equality, but she fails to recognize capitalism's own egalitarian logic, in contrast to Nietzsche. The capitalist elites whom Rand champions are the pale imitators of the genuine creators whom Nietzsche celebrates. A concern for profit is already the ultimate capitulation to the dictates of equality.[7]

Though Rand distances herself from Nietzsche because of his embrace of irrationality, the real distance concerns their relationship to capitalism.[8]

Deleuze, for his part, joins Nietzsche in the critique of capitalism, but he inserts a celebration of the excluded that has no place in Nietzsche's thought. For Deleuze, becoming, which Nietzsche sees as always leading in the direction of power, is the exclusive province of the marginalized and disenfranchised. Deleuze is a Nietzschean allergic to power, even though power represents the foundation of Nietzsche's thought. Consequently, he must completely impugn the traditional understanding of power and submit it to a thoroughgoing redefinition. Along these lines, in his early book on Nietzsche, Deleuze insists, "What we present to ourselves as power itself is merely the representation of power formed by the slave."[9] When Nietzsche talks about power, in other words, he is talking about something completely different from our usual idea, not the ugly representation that the slave has given to it. Deleuze must in this way strip the aristocratic element from Nietzsche's thought in order to make it palatable.

Though both Rand and Deleuze deform Nietzsche's critique of equality in order to fit it into their disparate political projects, the problem is not just this infidelity to Nietzsche's original critique. There is a weakness in the original critique itself that lies in Nietzsche's theoretical relationship to rupture. He locates value simultaneously in nature and in rupture, while failing to see the relationship between equality and rupture. On the one hand, Nietzsche defines life in terms of the will to power, and it is this will to power that acts as the source of value. Nature itself produces what has worth. But on the other hand, he proclaims the importance of overcoming and transcending. Value lies not in accepting the given of one's situation or being but in creating something new out of it. Of course, in order to avoid the blatant contradiction, Nietzsche attributes overcoming and transcending to nature itself, but he believes that nature nonetheless remains the same throughout the process of self-overcoming. That is to say, the fundamental law of nature—overcoming—remains immune to itself. Nietzsche fails to imagine the possibility, implicit in his very conception of overcoming, that a being might emerge for whom the will to dominate others no longer applies across the board. This is what occurs with speaking beings, whose rupture from the natural world creates equality as a value and as a possibility.

Ultimately, the intractable blind spot in Nietzsche's philosophy is his vitalism, his reduction of the subject to its status as a living being. The natural world prescribes its inherent inequality to the social world because the social being is in the last instance nothing but a natural being.

But what Nietzsche misses is that the social world is already the effect of nature's genuine self-overcoming. Human society has its basis in the natural world, but through it nature becomes something alien to itself. Though it emerges out of nature, the signifier produces a denaturalized being—the speaking subject. Rather than being controlled by needs, the subject desires on the basis of what psychoanalysis calls its drive, which represents a complete reformulation of the coordinates of the instinctive being. The rupture of the signifier uproots natural inequality and constitutes every subject as equal in and through this break.

The idea of equality, as Nietzsche shows repeatedly throughout his philosophy, is not natural. There is no equality in the natural world but rather dominance and imposition. The emergence of this idea constitutes a break from the natural world, an instance of self-overcoming. When humanity first advances the idea of equality, it achieves the kind of separation that Nietzsche would applaud if it occurred among individuals within the human world. But because it is a universal rupture, he is unable to see it properly as a source of value. Value, for Nietzsche, is always only relative, which means that the possibility of a universal value is oxymoronic for him—and an indication of a slave morality's nihilistic destruction of value rather than any positive assertion. In order to sustain this position, Nietzsche must root value within nature itself. He discovers the will to power as the ultimate principle of being, a principle that inheres in nature itself waiting for Nietzsche to find it. But in the act of speaking about this principle of being, he transforms it into a value to be promulgated. The "will to power" is no longer the will to power, and in the move from the latter to the former the value of equality emerges to shatter the validity of this principle for the speaking subject.[10]

Subjects are not equal insofar as they speak but insofar as they have been torn out of the natural world. This denaturalization constitutes the subject as a subject of the drive, which makes it at once a social and an antisocial being. The subject is a being at home neither in the natural world nor in the social world. Its social identity attempts to compensate for this absence of a place but always comes up short. But the failure of social identities of every stripe is the affirmation of the subject's equality. Subjects are equal because none of them have a proper place, though the forces of social identity are constantly trying to construct one for them. In *Theory of the Subject,* Alain Badiou takes note of this process when he contends, "A ruling class is the guardian of the place."[11] Equality forms not only in opposition to class rule but also in the absence of a place. All those who don't belong are equal, and it is precisely their failure to belong that constitutes their equality.

Je Pense Donc Je Suis Égal

It is fitting that the first thinker to provide an adequate philosophical basis for equality was one who never had a proper place.[12] Though we tend to think of him as the parent figure of French philosophy, René Descartes spent most of his adult life away from his home in France, and he died in the midst of a voyage to Sweden. Even though he wrote his first published work in French, he did so from his self-exile in the Dutch Republic. (The fact that Descartes wrote it in the vernacular rather than in Latin itself implicitly testifies to his egalitarianism.) Other philosophers, like John Locke, endured enforced exile, and still others, like Plato, left their native land to realize their political ideals. But we usually think of the philosopher as tied to a place. Though Kant's reluctance to leave the environs of Königsberg is obviously a hyperbolic case, philosophers are not identified with travel, perhaps because their explorations are mental rather than geographic.[13]

In terms of his relation to place, Descartes is exceptional among philosophers. Not only does he travel willingly and often, but travel plays a key role in his ability to forge an egalitarian idea of subjectivity. Descartes's conception of equality is inextricable from his lack of place. He credits his philosophical development not to the study of other philosophers but to his willingness to travel. In contrast, scholastic philosophy fails to discover the rupture of subjectivity because it remains insular and tied to its place. Nothing interrupts the hierarchy that sustains scholasticism. Just as there is no modern subject within the scholastic world, there is no philosophical apprehension of equality.

Descartes inaugurates the modern break from scholasticism through his refusal to stay in one place and study. In describing his philosophical genesis, he claims,

> as soon as I was old enough to emerge from the control of my teachers, I entirely abandoned the study of letters. Resolving to seek no knowledge other than that which could be found in myself or else in the great book of the world, I spent the rest of my youth travelling, visiting courts and armies, mixing with people of diverse temperaments and ranks, gathering various experiences, testing myself in the situations which fortune offered me, and at all times reflecting upon whatever came my way so as to derive some profit from it.[14]

Traveling from place to place becomes, in this vision of philosophy, the source of knowledge that cannot be found in study. When one travels, not only does one see different people and places, but also one abandons, even if only temporarily, one's attachment to a home. Though some undoubtedly travel only in order to be able to return home, traveling by definition involves a break from home.[15]

But it is not the mere fact of traveling that enables Descartes to theorize the equality of all subjects. Most travelers, in fact, use travel as a means for verifying their own superiority, as the history of European travel to the Americas attests most plainly. Other travelers use their voyages as a means for voyeuristically encountering exotic others that never have any substantial impact on them, which is why Descartes warns against turning travel into a fetish. Travel can serve as a detour for sustaining the status quo while pretending to do otherwise. But for Descartes, travel occurs from a philosophical position that privileges rupture, and this position shapes the role that travel has in Descartes's thought. When Descartes travels, he does so in order to call into question what he has been told and what he has accepted. His philosophy of radical doubt is a break from the givens of his situation—he claims, "I had to uproot from my mind all the wrong opinions I had previously accepted"—and this break enables him to see equals rather than inferiors when he travels.[16]

Differences derived from birth or culture evaporate in the process of radical doubt. All that remains is the thinking subject itself, and there is no ground for rank among subjects since doubt has eliminated the possibilities for hierarchy. The foundations of social hierarchy topple under the process of radical doubt. Descartes can recognize, in an astonishingly modern fashion, "how the same man, with the same mind, if brought up from infancy among the French or Germans, develops otherwise than he would if he had always lived among the Chinese or cannibals."[17] According to Descartes's formulation, cultural differences cannot conceal an essential equality among subjects, and this equality would manifest itself if we inserted people from one culture into another. From this position, no racist or sexist claim of superiority could be sustained.

In fact, the opening of *Discourse on the Method* is a panegyric to equality. In the first section, Descartes insists that, despite his philosophical discoveries, he doesn't count himself as in any way different from the ordinary person. All subjects are satisfied with their own good sense, he claims, and they are right to be so because it is distributed equally. But the sense of equality that pervades the first part of *Discourse on the Method* seems out of place with what follows simply because the focus on others drops out. In subsequent parts, Descartes attempts to eliminate the impact of other subjects on his thought.

The Cartesian method is one of introspection rather than observation or interaction. It takes others into account only in order to call their

existence into question. Certainty, for Descartes, resides in the doubt of the isolated subject, not in social bonds or relations to others. Even God comes subsequent to the doubting subject, despite the fact that it hypothetically created this subject. Equality in Cartesian thought is not first a social equality but the equality of those who are alienated in society and isolated in the act of thinking. Subjects are equal through their alienation from others and from themselves rather than through a bond that holds them together. The isolated subject is not only Descartes's starting point; it is also essential to his theorization of equality.

This starting point has also made Descartes a target for critique. In different ways, Emmanuel Levinas and Luce Irigaray react against the initial isolation of the Cartesian subject. Emmanuel Levinas takes Western philosophy as a whole to task for the presumption inherent in this starting point. As a corrective, he introduces the relation to otherness prior to the constitution of the subject, so that the subject depends on this relation in order to relate to itself in any way.[18] But Levinas is much gentler with Descartes than with his philosophical descendants because Descartes gives the encounter with the infinite an important role in acquiring certainty about the world.[19] For her part, Irigaray does not recognize any opening to otherness in Descartes's thought. She notes, "He took good care not to suppose, not to presuppose, that some other 'I' might be doubting too."[20] The isolation of the Cartesian subject is the illusory presupposition of patriarchal thinking.

The problem with this line of critique is that it would destroy the foundation for any sustainable justification for equality. Though many have argued for equality without any basis in Cartesian thought, Descartes's fundamental gesture—the break from what has been given in one's situation—is the foundation for all egalitarianism. It should not be surprising that one of the first great arguments for feminism comes not from a critique of Descartes but from a dedicated Cartesian.

In 1673, François Poulain de la Barre wrote *De l'égalité des deux sexes, discours physique et moral où l'on voit l'importance de se défaire des préjugés* (*On the Equality of the Two Sexes: A Physical and Moral Discourse Where One Sees the Importance of Undoing Prejudices*). This treatise argues for the equality of the sexes on the basis of their shared status as subjects capable of doubt, and Poulain de la Barre begins his work, in the manner of Descartes, with a statement about the deceptiveness of everyday appearances. He opens his book by claiming, "Men are persuaded of an infinity of things for which they cannot give reasons, because their persuasion is founded only on faint appearances, with which they have let themselves be taken away; and they would have also strongly believed

the contrary, if the impressions of sense or custom had determined it in the same fashion."[21] According to Poulain de la Barre, we can arrive at sexual equality only if we break from what our senses and customs give to us. A rupture is necessary.

In the rupture, the subject is singular, but it has no basis for superiority or inferiority in relation to any other subject.[22] Some version of Descartes's turn away from others is the only way to conceive equality without eliminating singularity. It is the only path to an idea of equality that doesn't ultimately fall victim to Nietzsche's critique. Without this rupture, one ends up with the inequality of nature or of the monotony of culture.

The equality that Descartes recognizes has nothing to do with nature or culture, and in this sense it vitiates the claims for equality made by its later proponents. Historically, the idea of nature has nourished the arguments for equality. The first sentence of the Declaration of Independence famously proclaims that equality inheres in creation itself.[23] One does not need to turn to Nietzsche's conception of nature as the will to power in order to see the rocks on which Jefferson's idea of natural equality would run aground. In terms of their biological status, it is clear that inequality, rather than equality, is the rule of the human species. Without the concept of the soul, the idea of natural equality stands little chance of surviving. As a result, its champions either sustain some version of the soul or they turn to the act of speaking and find the basis for equality there. The chief exponent of this turn is Jürgen Habermas with his theory of communicative rationality. In the ideal speech situation, one subject implicitly treats the other as equal, as a being to be persuaded rather than overcome with force. The problem with this solution is that it produces the reified equality that Nietzsche warns against. The subject of communicative rationality is necessarily the same as every other, and equality in this sense leads to homogeneity.[24]

Our claim is that all are equal because none are tied to the context out of which they emerge—neither their natural context nor their social context. The context provides a starting point, and no one can exist as if suspended in air. But everyone breaks from this context, and this rupture is unavoidable for the speaking subject. Even the subject that remains in its place will exist there as an alien being because subjectivity itself is always uprooted. The subjects who belong never properly belong. Subjects are equal insofar as they are included in the society but don't belong or insofar as they are what Jacques Rancière calls the "the part of those who have no part."[25] What every subject shares is the rupture that creates subjectivity, and no subject can have more or less of it than any other. We are equal in our failure to belong.

How to Teach to Equals

As Jacques Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* lets us glimpse, the failure to belong can end up leading to some striking insights into a genuine locus of equality—in intelligence. Rancière's remarkable book tells the story of Joseph Jacotot, a university teacher of French literature exiled to Louvain after the restoration (in 1814) of Louis XVIII to the French throne. Jacotot found himself in the unusual situation of having to teach French to students with whom he did not share a language: he knew no Flemish; they knew no French. Assigning his students a just-published bilingual edition of Fénelon's *Télémaque,* the twenty-four-volume novelistic imagining of the adventures of Telemachus from the point in Book IV of the *Odyssey* at which Telemachus learns of Odysseus's detainment on Calypso's isle, Jacotot directed them, essentially, to learn French solely with the help of the Flemish translation. To his great surprise, they achieved a command of French without his teaching them the language, without his explaining anything.

The results of this experiment led Jacotot to assert an equality of intelligence in all human beings, and to recommend a universal teaching rooted in the paradox of teaching what one does not know. (Jacotot himself moved on to teaching painting and piano—two subjects in which he had no skill, training, or capacity to explain.) Forced to experiment because of an experience of not belonging, Jacotot took the revolutionary step of *leaving out entirely* his own intelligence in the act of teaching. In this way, according to Rancière, Jacotot executed "a rupture with the logic of all pedagogies,"[26] refusing the cherished, professorial role of master explicator and demolishing the notion that some *other intelligence* is necessary for students to learn and understand. In so doing, he felled in one swoop "the myth of pedagogy, the parable of a world divided into knowing minds and ignorant ones, ripe minds and immature ones, the capable and the incapable, the intelligent and the stupid."[27] Through Jacotot's pedagogical insight, we can see how the abandonment of one's social and cultural identity—and the superiority inherent in it—can bring about a situation of intellectual equality.

The political thrust of Jacotot's teaching has something almost Protestant about it. Like the islanded Crusoe, whom Defoe shipwrecked on an island so that he might encounter the Bible without interference from the other's intelligence, all students need is *the book* and the command to study it. What Rancière calls emancipation involves precisely the severing of intelligence and will evinced in Jacotot's discovery. The desire of a human being can obey another human being's command, but human intelligence can obey only itself. A teacher's authority thus rests squarely

in the directive to attend to the letters and words of the book and not in expertise. Where there is inequality of intellectual performance there is only a deficient desire to learn, a desire not demanding enough to direct effort and attention to a task without having it explained by a teacher. Teachers committed to the emancipation of their students do not ratify the quality of a student's acquired knowledge; they verify instead that a student has paid attention.

There are questions worth asking here about the relationship between the intellectual emancipation Rancière sees in Jacotot's universal teaching and political emancipation in the world at large. How tied are equality of intelligence and political equality? Can intellectual emancipation proceed without care for societal inequities caused by capitalism and power? What, for instance, is the connection between Jacotot's pedagogy and the structural conditions in which education transpires today, with schools funded inequitably according to property taxes and with intellectual performance judged according to standardized tests that divide students over and over again and that determine the quality of teachers and schools? It is probably enough to note here just how many in contemporary society—with its emphasis on failing teachers, failing students, and failing schools—do not believe in the equality of intelligence shown us by Jacotot. Indeed, we would say that the equality of intelligence discovered by Jacotot *obliges us* to treat students' intelligence as equal, to speak to students as citizens. Jacotot's vision here is not the one that warranted Nietzsche's antipathy, wherein everyone's successes are judged as equal (as in the suburban recreational sports league in which everyone is a winner or in which the score is not kept).

Equality is neither an outcome nor a goal: it is, in some sense, what *already is.* So, paradoxically, the task of politics involves the creation of something that is already ontologically true—a repetition or reaffirmation of the rupture that separates us from things, making us creatures of the "the first principle of universal teaching: one must learn something and relate everything else to it. And first *something* must be learned."[28] Instead of "separate but equal"—explicitly rejected by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which ended segregated schooling but which continues to describe the myth of capitalist-democratic societies—we are equal on the basis of a separation.

The primacy Jacotot gives to the equality of intelligence in his students is for Rancière an ontological equality rooted in the fact of our being speaking beings. Indeed, the power of universal teaching has its coordinates already in our status as creatures of language. Flemish students confronting the French of *Télémaque* are very much like the rest of us, confronting the material dimensions of language and desiring to under-

stand them, speaking our own words in the hope that others will likewise understand them. Rancière writes, "In the act of speaking, man doesn't transmit his knowledge, he makes poetry; he translates and invites others to do the same."[29] Prominent in our efforts to communicate is thus an absence we share. In their use and arrangement of words (e.g., stanzas, enjambment, etc.) and in their concern for sound, lyric poets are especially adroit at calling attention to this absence and to the struggle and triumph of communication. Lyric poets highlight the genuinely arbitrary or creative relationship between signs and what they signify: the liquefaction that is the flow of Julia's silk clothes (Herrick); the coming musk rose that is mid-May's eldest child (Keats); the emperor of ice cream that is death (Stevens). The fact that objects or feelings or experiences can be named in thousands of ways, or that there are even hundreds of languages, would seem to point up an insurmountable obstacle to communication—a sign of some ancient harmony lost.

What Rancière calls "the poetic condition of the speaking being"[30] is for him, however, the constitutive element of human sociality. As he puts it, "It is because there is no code given by divinity, no language of languages, that human intelligence employs all its art to making itself understood and to understanding what the neighboring intelligence is signifying."[31] The rupture from the natural world that signification requires forces us to relate to one another as equal intelligences. This is what makes the poetic speech act so significant: everyone equally must try to figure out where sense lies. In some way, the explanatory note in a poem distills the essence of (poetic) communication proper. T. S. Eliot's elaborately allusive "The Waste Land" does not so much give us a source of meaning and consolation in its amalgamation of fragments but testifies to an equality in the very *will to figure out,* to understand and seek to communicate *for the other's figuring out* moments in our lives and cultures.[32] In his collection of recent poems *Here, Bullet,* the Iraq War veteran Brian Turner uses a single Arabic word to title several of his poems, telegraphing how the most minimal aspect of translation is inseparable from his attempt to figure out—or put into words—his experience. It is this gesture, seen as well in his use of Arabic sayings and proverbs as epigraphs, that draws the equal sign between his, ours, and the Iraqis' intelligence.[33]

The Bluest Paradise

It is perhaps not surprising that lyric poems are in many respects a form of language that does not belong. Ours is a world of language for the

purpose of telling stories—for histories that show how a given figure or movement belongs to its context, or novels that, though they might concern themselves with the failure to belong, stage the passage of characters from alienation to belonging. This is especially true in the case of the novel, which as a form is dedicated to producing subjects who belong. Thus, as lyric poems call attention to their linguistic materiality and try essentially to figure something out in language, novels work frequently by plot to produce moments of attachment, alliance, and inclusion. Characters like Elizabeth Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice* or Pip in *Great Expectations* follow a trajectory that leads them into the heart of a society in which they are secure members. Even the modernist novel devoted to sustaining a sense of alienation seems almost inevitably to fall back into this novelistic path. Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses* ends up in bed next to his wife, and Quentin Compson at the end of *Absalom, Absalom!* finds himself thoroughly ensconced in southern society despite his attempt to distance himself from it. If subjects are equal in the failure to belong, the novel seems to be an artistic form inadequate to this recognition.

In his classic account of the origins of the novel, Ian Watt stresses the role that the novel form has in constituting a social order out of individuals. Though the novel is born with modernity and the eradication of traditional social bonds, it takes the construction of a new type of bond as its central task. This is evident, according to Watt, even in a novel like Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe,* which depicts Crusoe on an island without a society. Watt contends, "It is appropriate that the tradition of the novel should begin with a work that annihilated the relationships of the traditional social order, and thus drew attention to the opportunity and need of building up a network of personal relationships on a new and conscious pattern."[34] The essential function of the shipwreck in Defoe's novel, we could say, is to enable a human subject to enact the formation of a new social order of sorts—a social order rooted in Protestant soteriology, in which one's salvation is predestined or justified by faith; in labor that is efficient and more entrepreneurial, in which class mobility and the accumulation of profits are encouraged; and in fellowship with the other, in which one aims not to convert the other to this or that doctrine but rather to live and converse together joined by the more generic Word of God. As much as the novel recounts the alienation of the individual subject in modernity, it also depicts this alienation giving way to a sense of belonging in spite of its persistence.

Toni Morrison's novels do not entirely escape this formal exigency. Even her most accomplished novels provide some form of belonging for characters and readers at the end that was not present in the beginning.

But what Morrison shows in the meantime is that this belonging, however secure it might seem, will never eclipse the break that separates the subject from its place in society. The greatness of Morrison consists in her insistence that we affirm our equality not through acquiring some exclusive status but through the abandonment of any status whatsoever. She is the foremost American novelist of equality because she is the foremost American novelist of rupture.[35]

Morrison's concern with the relationship between rupture and equality begins on the very first page of her first novel. Most critics concede that *The Bluest Eye* is the weakest of Morrison's novels because it lacks the subtlety of the later fiction and baldly asserts its claims about racism and inequality in general. It is also the most straightforward in its enactment of rupture. It is as if Morrison presents the essence of her novelistic form for readers to examine and employ as a way of approaching the more complex novels that follow.

Morrison begins *The Bluest Eye* with a version of the story from the grade school primer about Dick and Jane. This brief story, designed to teach children how to read basic sentences, also has a clear ideological function that Morrison wants to make evident. It defines normalcy in terms of the (implicitly white) upper-middle-class American family. According to this tale, wealth, health, and happiness are the rule. The idiotic simplicity of the story obscures the ideology, but it is nonetheless apparent in the description of the house as "very pretty," the family as "very happy," and the father as "big and strong."[36] When Morrison opens her novel with this Dick and Jane story, she simply relates it without highlighting its ideological structure. But then she repeats the story in the two subsequent paragraphs.

The second paragraph of the novel repeats the first verbatim but subtracts the punctuation marks. In the third paragraph, Morrison removes even the spaces between the words so that everything runs together and becomes more difficult to decipher. With this gesture, she shows not just the dominance of the ideology that the story expresses but also how this ideology functions. The Dick and Jane story supports an inegalitarian world because it represses any break or rupture in its structure. The third version of the story—the version without any spaces at all—is thus the true version.[37] When children read the story, they read it without any space in which those who don't belong to its vision of the world might have a place. Ideology works in exactly this way: it hides the blank spaces, though without ever making it as clear as Morrison does in *The Bluest Eye*. The recurrence of capitalized, run-together excerpts of the Dick and Jane story that introduce new sections of the novel remind us visually of this.

After the three paragraphs that repeat the Dick and Jane story, the novel takes a dramatic turn. Whereas these opening paragraphs reveal an absence of any break and highlight the flow of ideology, the next paragraph introduces the kind of rupture that would become characteristic of Morrison as a writer. In the first sentences, the narrator, Claudia MacTeer, recounts, "Quiet as it's kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941. We thought, at the time, that it was because Pecola was having her father's baby that the marigolds did not grow."[38] With these shocking sentences about a girl impregnated by her father, Morrison breaks completely from the ideological continuity of the Dick and Jane story. We see right away that what happens to Pecola Breedlove has no place within this story.

The rest of the novel emphasizes Pecola's failure to belong. She is mocked by her black schoolmates for having blacker skin than they, and for living in such close quarters that she has seen her father naked. In the school-yard taunts she has Pecola receive, Morrison again breaks from the conventions of narrative prose and its appearance on the page. So not only does Pecola's father rape her, but also she lives in abject poverty and total social ostracism. She desires only the blue eyes that signify beauty in the white world, though her blackness renders access to the white ideals of beauty impossible. Though the content of the novel undoubtedly generates pity for the alienated and abused Pecola, its form demands more than pity. By beginning with Pecola's rape by her father, Morrison submits the reader to a rupture with the power of tradition in order to locate equality there.

The continuity of the Dick and Jane story creates a dichotomy between those who belong and those, like Pecola, who do not. The violence of Pecola's failure to belong interrupts this reigning inequality. The form of the novel—its positioning of a rupture after the narrative of inegalitarian inclusion and belonging—puts the reader in the position of Pecola, even if she is not ultimately the central point of the reader's identification. Morrison doesn't depict Pecola ultimately finding inclusion of some sort but instead reveals her failure to belong. The only way out of racist exclusionary practices, Morrison shows, is in the equality that exists in the break from the story that promises a secure identity. Only this break can allow us to glimpse, as Morrison's Claudia MacTeer does, the extent to which our ideas about race and property fail the Pecola Breedloves of the world.

The Bluest Eye uses form—specifically the formal treatment of the Dick and Jane story—to align the reader with the ostracized Pecola, to begin to constitute an equality through rupture. But subsequently the novel retreats from this alignment. We do not recognize ourselves as equals in Pecola's failure to belong; rather, the novel enables us to look on her plight from a position outside it. The problem does not lie in the simple

content of *The Bluest Eye* but in its inability to generalize Pecola's failure to belong as the fundamental condition of equality. The novel offers us a point of identification outside Pecola and her rupture.

The egalitarian force of rupture becomes more prominent in Morrison's masterpiece, *Beloved.* And yet even this novel does not go to the end in its connection of equality and rupture on the level of form. Unlike many of her novels (*The Bluest Eye* and *Jazz,* for instance), *Beloved* does not begin explicitly with the rupture but instead subtly alludes to it in the novel's slightly cryptic dedication "Sixty Million and more" and in the opening paragraph. In fact, the violent rupture that functions as the primary event of the novel never explicitly appears in the novel. The main character of *Beloved,* Sethe, kills her own daughter in order to prevent the daughter from being captured by Sethe's white owner. When it happens, we experience this act not from a third-person omniscient perspective or from Sethe's own but from the viewpoint of schoolteacher, the owner who had come to reclaim Sethe and her children. The only sentence capable of referring to this act from the perspective of the victim in slavery—"how can I say things that are pictures"[39]—comes in the account of the Middle Passage narrated by Beloved that constitutes a radical break from the conventions of novelistic discourse.

Sethe kills her own child so that she will not have to live under the regime of slavery, whose brutality occasions the dedication. Her child will not be raped by schoolteacher, nor will she endure the constant humiliation and dehumanization. The horror that Sethe's act occasions sends schoolteacher back to his plantation empty-handed and does free her from his tyranny. In this rupture from the expected and accepted modes of behavior, Sethe proclaims her equality as a subject. After her act, she exists outside the social norms that govern interaction, but it is precisely here that she finds equality, and Morrison's novel encourages the reader to embrace the act along with Sethe.

The other characters in the novel, however, view Sethe's act as an expression of her inhumanity. Not only the racist white characters like schoolteacher but also Sethe's longtime friend Paul D tells her, "You've got two feet, Sethe, not four."[40] For Paul D, Sethe has left the realm of humanity altogether. But as Morrison makes clear, this affirmation of the animality of killing one's own child completely misses the mark. By acting as she does, Sethe proclaims her status as an equal subject who cannot be controlled by an external authority. She ensures that she does not belong to schoolteacher and breaks from her place on the plantation. Sethe breaks from the social structure that would make sense of her act: she sacrifices what is most precious to her, and this sacrifice shatters

the regime of sense. But the very way that Morrison presents Sethe's act complicates its status as a rupture. As Jean Wyatt notes in the definitive commentary on the novel, "The novel withholds judgment on Sethe's act and persuades the reader to do the same, presenting the infanticide as the ultimate contradiction of mothering under slavery."[41] Nonetheless, Sethe's rupture—which Morrison presents as a rupture for the reader as well—shows everyone that she does not participate in the system of inequality that dominates social relations. Killing her child locates her outside, where equality prevails.[42]

The break that takes place in *Paradise* makes clearest the connection between rupture and equality that defines Morrison as a novelist, and with this novel, Morrison's fictional treatment of the power of rupture reaches its apogee, even if the rupture is not as dramatic in its content as that of *Beloved.* The opening lines of *Paradise* depict abrupt violence. It begins, "They shoot the white girl first. With the rest they can take their time. No need to hurry out here. They are seventeen miles from a town which has ninety miles between it and any other. Hiding places will be plentiful in the Convent, but there is time and the day has just begun."[43] One reads this opening without any sense of what is happening or where it happens. Only the violence is clear. Though the rest of the novel ultimately provides enlightenment about what happens, what doesn't become evident is the identity of the white girl. Morrison mentions race in the initial line, and then she subsequently turns away from it.

The opening sentence of the novel encourages the reader to search for the identity of the white character among the victims of the attack, but the backstory doesn't allow this search to come to any satisfying fruition. By suggesting the importance of race and then minimizing it, Morrison aims to break out of racialist thinking, but doing so requires the violent cut that opens the novel. In this cut, all are equal. The women who are the victims of the shooting are equal regardless of their racial difference because they exist outside any social identity. This is why the men of the town shoot them, but even this violence cannot force them to belong.

Toni Morrison's novels all include an implicit critique of inegalitarian society. They also depict the path to equality, but this path is always a violent one. Morrison subjects her readers to violent ruptures in order to make evident the cost of equality. It is not enough to proclaim that everyone is created equal or that we must treat everyone with the same respect. A commitment to equality doesn't require that one go as far as Sethe and kill one's own child, but it does demand a similar refusal of belonging. Though Morrison's novels conclude with some sense of belonging—even Sethe manages to find an idea of self in the end—these endings are always

interrupted by what precedes them. Their aim is to create a reader who takes up the equality of failing to belong. The novels make clear that it is only by abandoning the privileges of all inequality that one can genuinely proclaim one's egalitarianism.

Sartre Contra Heidegger

No philosophy has explored alienation more than existentialism: as most existentialists see it, alienation is the irreducible fact of human existence. The subject is always out of joint in reference to itself. But existentialism has an ambivalent relationship to rupture. On the one hand, existentialism develops in kinship with phenomenology, which grounds itself in the experience that exists prior to any rupture. Phenomenology takes immediate experience, prior to any theoretical mediation of that experience, as its starting point.[44] On the other hand, existentialism privileges the decisive moment that rips the individual out of its everydayness. Following Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger labels this experience a moment of vision and credits it with delivering the individual over to its authentic being.[45] Without the possibility of rupture, the individual would be doomed to live without ever existing and would scarcely be different from an animal. Though existentialism wants to understand the individual as rooted in its lifeworld, it also grasps how the lifeworld is necessarily transcended.

Existentialism's ambivalence concerning rupture parallels its ambivalence concerning equality, and in fact the former ambivalence can explain the latter. Existentialists of the Right like Heidegger interpret equality solely in terms of the leveling tendency of modern society. Equality is a symptom of a world in which humanity has lost touch with the danger of being and ceases to be capable of greatness. Equality, for Heidegger, fails to envision the possibility of authenticity. In contrast, existentialists of the Left like Jean-Paul Sartre link their commitment to equality to a shared rupture. Because there is no value independent of the rupture that creates it, every subject's project that separates it from its situation has an equal value. As Sartre points out in *Being and Nothingness,* "All human activities are equivalent . . . and all are on principle doomed to failure. Thus it amounts to the same thing whether one gets drunk alone or is a leader of nations."[46] Equality isn't natural but is tied to the way that we exist. This means that the duty of the existentialist, as Sartre conceives it, is to struggle for equality.

Without equality, there is no freedom because one's own freedom depends on that of others. This is why Sartre famously rejects the idea of a

good novel that would support inequality. He claims, "Nobody can suppose for a moment that it is possible to write a good novel in praise of anti-Semitism. For, the moment I feel my freedom is indissolubly linked with that of all other men, it cannot be demanded of me that I use it to approve the enslavement of a part of these men."[47] Though Sartre is renowned as a philosopher of freedom, it is his emphasis on equality that distinguishes him as an existentialist thinker.

In a certain sense, Heidegger appears to be the thinker more philosophically proximate to Leftist politics than Sartre, despite Heidegger's overt identification with Nazism and Sartre's with communism.[48] The fundamental difference between the philosophy of Heidegger and that of Sartre concerns the individual's relation to others. In *Being and Time,* Heidegger famously demolishes the traditional philosophical problem of the existence of others not by answering it but by declaring it completely invalid. Philosophers never should have doubted whether others exist because the individual's existence implies the others' and vice versa. There is a solidarity written into our very being, and this solidarity undermines the individualism that is the wellspring of capitalist ideology. Heidegger proclaims, "So far as Dasein *is* at all, it has Being-with-one-another as its kind of Being. This cannot be conceived as a summative result of the occurrence of several 'subjects.' "[49] There is no problem of the existence of others in Heidegger's thought because the isolation of the individual subject occurs on the basis of a more fundamental bond with others through which the subject can emerge at all. Heidegger's famous rejection of the term "subject" in favor of "Dasein" indicates his hostility to isolated individualism. Unlike the subject, Dasein (being there) is part of a world inhabited by others, not separated from them. Isolation loses its ontological primacy, and capitalist relations of production lose their philosophical justification.[50]

The case is radically different with Sartre. Though he proclaims his allegiance to Leftist political causes, Sartre never abandons his philosophical investment in the individual subject, and he specifically refuses Heidegger's sidestepping of the problem of the existence of others. As Sartre sees it, the fundamental relation with others is not being with them but conflict—not Heidegger's being-with but perhaps instead being-against—a Sartrean *gegensein* instead of a Heideggerian *mitsein.*[51] The existence of others makes me experience shame at being transformed into an object, and I struggle with them in order to eliminate my own status as an object. Subjectivity is a fight against the objectivity that others impose on me, no matter how well-intentioned they may be. But this struggle is unwinnable: the different forms that relations with others take testify to the per-

petual nature of the conflict between the subject and the other. Even when he aligns himself most completely with Marxism, Sartre cannot abandon the idea that the subject's struggle will persist in some form.

Despite this seeming adherence to the individualism of capitalist ideology, Sartre's commitment to the Left and to equality does have a basis in his version of existentialism. In fact, it is precisely Sartre's emphasis on the break between the individual subject and others that provides a philosophical avenue for constituting equality. The individual subject, for Sartre, is isolated in its project. Though the project always circumscribes the subject's choices, at any time the subject can freely change projects. It is with the idea of the project that Sartre locates rupture within existentialism. The project is the vehicle for transcending the situation, the vehicle through which the subject refuses to be what it is. In *Search for a Method,* Sartre claims,

> Man defines himself by his project. This material being perpetually goes beyond the condition which is made for him; he reveals and determines his situation by transcending it in order to objectify himself—by work, action, or gesture. The project must not be confused with the will, which is an abstract entity, although the project can assume a voluntary form under certain circumstances. This immediate relation with the Other than oneself, beyond the given and constituted elements, this perpetual production of oneself by a work and *praxis,* is our peculiar structure.[52]

Through the project, the subject breaks from what determines it. Though history gives the subject the situation in which it exists, the subject's project, as Sartre understands it, cannot be determined by history.

A despot may force me to perform any number of acts, but no one can force me to make these acts part of my project. The space of the project is free of hierarchy because the project separates the subject from natural and cultural forms of inequality. All subjects are equal in the project. As Orestes puts it to Zeus in *The Flies,* rejecting the latter's tyrannical rule, "Neither slave nor master. I *am* my freedom."[53] The capacity for the rupturing project exists in the same form for the richest people in the world and for the poorest. It is the position that they take up relative to their situation—and thus has nothing to do with the situation itself. Though this conception of the project places Sartre in political hot water among Leftist critics (who want him to account more for material conditions), he does not give it up.

In Heidegger's thought, history plays a greater role than in does in Sartre's, despite the latter's affinity for Marxism. As a result, there is no

equivalent concept to the Sartrean project in Heidegger's thought. Though Heidegger views Dasein as constantly transcending itself toward the future, this transcendence is tied to the possibilities that are given by history. Rather than breaking from what has been given, Heidegger's authentic Dasein discovers the given that everyday life obscures. In the discussion of history in *Being and Time,* Heidegger claims, "The resoluteness in which Dasein comes back to itself, discloses current factical possibilities of authentic existing, and discloses them *in terms of the heritage* which that resoluteness, as thrown, *takes over.* In one's coming back resolutely to one's thrownness, there is a hidden *handing down* to oneself of the possibilities that have come down to one."[54] Rather than breaking from history's dictates by freely adopting a project, Dasein takes up the possibilities that its heritage has given it; Dasein gives itself what has already "come down" to it through history. The rupture that Sartre envisions occurring with the project is inconceivable from this perspective. All that Dasein can do is to live out its given possibilities authentically or inauthentically.

Dasein's task does not involve challenging the inequalities inherent in its heritage but in assuming them as its existential burden. The space for equality falls out in Heidegger's thought in order to make room for the authority of history. Though authenticity implies an individualistic confrontation with death in the first three-fourths of *Being and Time,* in the final sections Heidegger links it to Dasein's embrace of the determinations given by history. While the idea of an authentic being-toward-death sounds like the pillar on which to build a philosophy of rupture, Heidegger cannot sustain this idea. It is as if Heidegger himself takes flight from the senselessness of the individual's death in order to find solace in the embrace of a collective history. The leap that occurs in the second division of *Being and Time* is one of the great retreats in the history of Western thought.[55] The rupture disappears along with the equality of every Dasein existing alone in its anticipation of death. As he moves away from rupture in *Being and Time,* Heidegger moves toward the philosophy that would allow him publicly to embrace the overt inequalities proclaimed by Nazism.[56] One might say that if *Being and Time* had ended differently (or sooner), Heidegger would never have been able to give the "Rectorship Address," in which he made his most straightforward public identification with Nazism's profound inauthenticity.[57]

If existentialism can justify a right-wing politics in the case of Heidegger and a left-wing politics in the case of Sartre, it seems as if its political content is neutral and consequently up for grabs. Either side can place existentialism in the service of its political ends. Though there is some truth to this claim, what is significant for a philosophy and a politics of

rupture is that the political valence that existentialism adopts depends on the role that rupture plays in it. Heidegger's brand of existentialism—a term, it should be noted, that he emphatically refused—abandons rupture at the crucial point, while Sartre's version sustains it. When existentialism becomes the basis for a political platform, as is the case when Simone de Beauvoir writes *The Second Sex,* its link to rupture becomes even more pronounced.

The Lack of a Rupture

Simone de Beauvoir's philosophical allegiance to the existentialism of rupture is not just a consequence of her relationship with Jean-Paul Sartre and her role in forming their shared version of existentialism. This allegiance is what enables her to direct existentialist speculation toward feminist politics in *The Second Sex*. Heidegger's philosophy has no room for feminist contestation. Though women might authentically relate to their death, they cannot break from the heritage that history passes down to them, and this history is one of male domination. Through the project's rupture, however, women can break from the dictates of history. Rupture provides the basis for de Beauvoir to conceive sexual equality—all are equal in the rupture—but it also allows her to understand the history of sexual inequality.

The idea of rupture is at the heart of de Beauvoir's critique of the history of sexism. She claims that sexism functions in a specific philosophical way. Rather than simply demeaning and dominating women, male-controlled society has systematically refused women the possibility of rupture. In one sense, it is impossible to refuse the possibility of rupture to anyone, since this possibility emerges with subjectivity itself. But it is possible to limit the scope of rupture and to promulgate the idea that rupture is unthinkable for a certain group. This is precisely what patriarchal society does to women.

Most conspicuously, this involves condemning women to the domestic sphere, circumscribing or muffling altogether their desire, and prohibiting or limiting access to the public world. Whereas men, with an abundance of occupations open to them, leave their home every day to participate in the world of politics and commerce, women remain in the home taking care of the children and managing the household.[58] Whatever the relative value of these gender-specific tasks—and there is no shortage of panegyrics to the beauty and significance of motherhood and homemaking—what matters, from de Beauvoir's perspective, is the consignment of

the woman to a specific place. Almost fifty years before *The Second Sex,* Charlotte Perkins Gilman called this women's "segregation to maternal duties."[59] The simplest rupture—leaving the domestic space and entering independently into the public world—is made difficult if not impossible for her. There is no avenue for her to transcend herself by encountering the variegations of public life.

The denial of transcendence extends to (and is fundamentally informed by) the traditional patriarchal associations made surrounding women. From Aristotle to Paul to Aquinas, women must bear the weighty destiny of the procreative body rather than breaking from it. De Beauvoir claims, "The female, more than the male, is prey to the species; humanity has always tried to escape from its species' destiny; with the invention of the tool, maintenance of life became activity and project for man, while motherhood left woman riveted to her body like the animal."[60] Patriarchal society assigns a homebound, gestational body to women, while granting to men the ontological mandate or prerogative to transcend their bodies and be valued for other things. Answering a supposed theological question—"whether or not women should have been made in the first production of things"—Aquinas finds women not to be defective (or, to use Aristotle's word, misbegotten) because they are "ordered to the work of generation." Men, on the other hand, have a divinely ontological directive that is explicitly postcoital. Unlike plants, he writes, men are not continually united with women "but only at the time of coition" (at which time women's "passive power" joins with the male sex's "active power of generation") because "man is further ordered to a still nobler work of life, and that is intellectual operation."[61] Tied to the work of generation, women thus gain social recognition for that which is antithetical to the intellect and its exercise: their attractiveness.

Though some women manage to become valued for something other than looks—usually by other women, as in the case of Oprah Winfrey—even today this remains the rule. Girls as young as three and four participate in beauty pageants replete with spray tans, fake teeth, evening gowns, and high heels, and even the most accomplished female athletes are privileged for their (societally deemed) attractiveness and not their particular skills in sport. Men, in contrast, find acclaim for their wealth, intellect, wit, bravery, and many other things. The setup here rigs the game in advance: as men age, they can acquire more of what renders them appealing—more money, knowledge, wit, and so on—but women can only lose what makes them appealing or attempt to slow the loss through diet, exercise, or even surgery. This dynamic reveals the extent to which the rupture from the body remains off-limits to women today.

As de Beauvoir sees it, there will be no realization of sexual equality until there is an equal access to rupture from the body—until we live in a world where a young man's sexual relationship with an elderly woman, such as the one depicted in *Harold and Maude* (Hal Ashby, 1971) is no longer an anomaly.

De Beauvoir's belief that feminism must advocate a rupture from the body has proven the most controversial aspect of her feminist philosophy. By arguing for a female rupture from the body, she accepts the traditional patriarchal devaluation of the body. That is, according to this critique, de Beauvoir integrates a fundamental tenet of patriarchy into her attempt to contest it. Judith Butler gives this critique one of its most well-known formulations. She says, "Beauvoir proposes that the female body ought to be the situation and instrumentality of women's freedom, not a defining and limiting essence. The theory of embodiment informing Beauvoir's analysis is clearly limited by the uncritical reproduction of the Cartesian distinction between freedom and the body."[62] It is true that de Beauvoir does not associate freedom with the body. But neither does she associate it with disembodied spirit. As a philosopher of rupture, de Beauvoir sees freedom in the break from the body, a break in which the body is not denied but plays a central role as the point of departure. Freedom, for her, requires the body as the site of the subject's transcendence.

In de Beauvoir's thought, the barrier to sexual equality does not involve men who refuse to give up their power. It is not male attachment to patriarchal privilege that stops men from treating women as equals. The reason is altogether psychic. For all of de Beauvoir's critique of psychoanalysis in *The Second Sex,* she provides a compelling psychoanalytic explanation for the persistence of sexist society.[63] The subjugation of women has its coordinates in the masculine repression of the trauma of rupture. By associating women with the domestic sphere and with the body, men deny their own attachment to domesticity and to the body, which allows them to repress dimensions of the break from private being to public citizen or from biological body to speaking subject. Neither domesticity nor the body is in itself traumatic, but what is traumatic is the transformation that leaves these sites behind and yet remains attached to them as a point of departure.

A man's social identity remains enigmatically tied to the stupidity of sexual difference—the nonsensically visible flesh of the penis and the entitlements it is presumed to naturalize or authorize. These entitlements are confused by the penis's tie to biology (e.g., the urinal splash guards that read "You hold the power to stop rape in your hands"). As long as women continue to be tied exclusively to the body, the social power of men can continue to find its legitimacy in invocations of the superior reasoning and intellect of men. Men claim and exercise their power without ever having to acknowledge the alienating rupture that divides nature and conditions the emergence of a world in which the scripts for masculinity and femininity are up for grabs. In short, a man does not have to reckon with the question of just what the fact of his penis entitles him to, with the gap that exists between a human being and his or her biological makeup or bodily functions. It is in this way that, according to de Beauvoir, "the problem of woman has always been a problem of men."[64] The embodied woman enables the man to avoid the (false) shame of embodiment—to remain psychically and strategically disembodied rather than being a subject that no longer fits properly in its body. This is why the bodies of women are today everywhere but the penis is never to be seen.[65]

The female norm constructed by patriarchy allows men to evade the terms of their own passage from biology to culture. But it does this by shifting the actors in the drama of the subject's encounter with difference. Instead of an encounter between men (as it were)—the otherness of men's bodies *for men*—men confront and work through a different rupture using women as the bearer of an alterity. In this way, they acknowledge a form of rupture on the cheap. A man transcends himself through the conquest of a virginal female otherness, prepared and softened up in advance to strengthen a fundamental virility. According to de Beauvoir, "The woman is the Other in which the subject surpasses himself without being limited, who opposes him without negating him; she is the Other who lets herself be annexed to him without ceasing to be the Other. And for this she is so necessary to man's joy and to his triumph that it can be said that if she did not exist, men would have had to invent her."[66] Just as much as women enable men to repress rupture, they allow men to accomplish it, over and over again, by marking a site of mysterious otherness. Through the conquest of this mystery, the man becomes other than he is while remaining secure within his male identity. As long as this false version of rupture persists, there can be no sexual equality.

De Beauvoir constructs a vision of sexual equality achievable through equal access to rupture. No matter what political arrangement predominates, rupture ensures that everyone is equal. But we can recognize this equality only when we grant everyone equal access to rupture. No one can be identified with a place or with a body. Achieving the recognition of equality demands an end to the repression of rupture's trauma. The barrier to equality is not just an absence of goodwill. Inequality continues because we continue to repress the trauma of equality. As equals, we would have to avow the failure of all identity rather than taking refuge in it.

Misplacing Femininity

Feminist practice in the wake of de Beauvoir's work integrated the idea of rupture into its political action. Feminism took as its goal the interruption of the woman's confinement to the private sphere and its ineluctable tie to the procreative body. In the United States, this confinement began to be lifted even prior to the publication of *The Second Sex* with the passage of women's suffrage and with the growing availability of contraceptives. After the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920, women gained the right to vote, which provided women entrance into one area of the public world.[67] Also in the 1920s, Margaret Sanger opened the first legal birth control clinic, and doctors began legally to prescribe birth control methods to their patients.[68] These represented major victories for feminism, but they left much inequality intact in relations between men and women. In the years following these victories, dissatisfaction with persistent inequality led to another feminist political movement, known as second-wave feminism, which prospered in the 1960s and 1970s. While first-wave feminism had the clear goal of the right to vote and to have some control over birth, the second wave envisioned equality in a broader sense after having witnessed how little suffrage and contraceptives changed the material conditions of women.

The practice of the second wave took as its starting point the mantra "The personal is the political." This idea, which proliferated widely in the movement and in the society at large, attempts to transform or revalue the domestic situation in which many women find themselves. If the personal is the political, this means that the domestic realm is also a site of potential rupture rather than just a place for natural reproduction. The place where women had historically worked (the home) and the tasks to which they were confined (motherhood) become politicized sites and thus cease to remain the same. Feminism wants to reveal the uncanniness of the domestic sphere.

Of course, second-wave feminism rejected the patriarchal idea that "the woman's place is in the home" by insisting that woman has no proper place.[69] But for those women who remained in the domestic sphere or who were mothers, "The personal is the political" provided a way for them to break with their place and their maternal role while remaining within them. By politicizing domestic space, second-wave feminists uprooted it and took away its sense of being a secure and stable place that domesticity connoted. As Sheila Rowbotham notes in her study of the history of feminist activism, "The modern women's movement linked inequalities of home and work. It brought into the political arena housework and sexuality; daily life in the community and family were seen as sites of struggle and consciousness."[70] After the second wave's interrogation of patriarchy, there was no place in which one could be rooted, not even the home.

While the right to vote brought a semblance of legal equality and the availability of contraceptives brought a measure of freedom, they left women unequal insofar as they left them in their proper place—as wives, as mothers, as sexual objects, or as underpaid laborers. In order to achieve equality, women would have to break from their place—and this break would entail a corresponding rupture for men. Suffrage and contraceptives left the relationship with men relatively intact. Men continued to function as the primary breadwinners and kept women, for the most part, in a secondary status. Suffrage and birth control did not provide the radical change that their proponents believed they would provide. A more decisive rupture with patriarchy was necessary—one that would culminate in amendments to the 1964 Civil Rights Act to include women and the ultimate liberation from the contingent outcomes of sex: the right to choice. These bolder steps away from the tie to the body (and to domesticity) happen alongside and are informed by the development of new, second-wave feminist strategies, including the celebrated consciousness-raising sessions.

The consciousness-raising sessions of the 1970s certainly don't appear to belong to the politics of rupture. Though these sessions allowed women to express their grievances with patriarchy and gain a sense of solidarity, they did not aim at revolution. In fact, the second wave eventually ran aground on the divide between liberal feminists, who wanted to work within the social order, and more radical feminists, who envisioned either breaking from it or dramatically transforming it. Consciousness-raising did not represent the radical edge of second-wave feminism, but it nonetheless enacted rupture in practice and hence articulated the ideal of equality.

The consciousness-raising sessions dislocated women from the usual routine and position. Women interrupted their weekly schedule to attend the sessions, and the sessions broke from the model of patriarchal society in their organization. A strict idea of equality ruled many of the conscious-raising groups, and this idea had a direct link with the break from patriarchal organizational models. As Marlene LeGates recounts, "Determined to be more consistent than the male left in practicing internal democracy, second-wave feminists were ultrasensitive to charges of elitism or hierarchy. The Feminists, in New York, initiated a disc system to prevent discussions from being dominated by certain members. Each member received the same number of discs and had to return one each time she spoke. If she ran out before the others, she had to wait."[71] The attempt to ensure an equality of participation in consciousness-raising

groups was the product of a rupture with how organization was conceived. Though not every feminist group of the 1970s employed this system, the idea of equality was privileged throughout. The women in the groups were equal just insofar as they had broken from their traditional role and attended the meeting.

The equality that characterized the consciousness-raising session did not last, and neither did the emphasis on rupture from woman's place. Second-wave feminism devolved into a cultural feminism celebrating where women came from rather than trying to break from it. The political charge that comes from the rupture with place disappears, and feminism becomes nothing but a lifestyle choice. LeGates notes, "Cultural feminism celebrated the validity and strength of specific characteristics attributed to women. With cultural feminism, lifestyle, rather than one's political commitment, became the primary issue."[72] Though feminism had made great political inroads, the lure of a return to place finally overwhelmed much of its political strength. Even if this place was not the one originally assigned by patriarchy, the assurance offered by place itself runs antithetical to the rupture that equality requires. We sustain equality only insofar as we aren't where we belong.

Patriarchy and other forms of traditional society enforce inequality by hewing to a strict conception of place. Each class has its proper place; each family has its proper place; and each sex has its proper place. Interrupting the dominance of place is the only way to transform this inequality into equality. When Descartes left France and traveled, he forged a philosophy of subjectivity in which everyone has access to subjectivity's most far-reaching claims. When the American women of second-wave feminism recognized the limitations of the Nineteenth Amendment in the fight for equality, they decided to leave the home and at the same time transform the home so that it could no longer function as a woman's proper place. This rupture was a difficult one because it deprived women of the fundamental identity that patriarchy willingly granted them—being the representative of home.

The trauma of the break from place derives from the abandonment of the roots of one's identity. Without a place, the subject is on its own: it can't rely on the traditional bonds of family, neighborhood, or heritage. But it is only by turning away from our place that we can forge equality, which exists in the rupture from place. We are equal not because we all have the status as natural or as speaking beings, but because none of us belong to a place. Whatever place we initially come from, we transcend. Our inability to go home again or to find another home is the index of our equality.

Chapter Five

Freedom

Freedom functions as the watchword of contemporary neoliberalism and even more generally of today's global capitalism. Whenever the nations aligned in the neoliberal consensus want to intervene elsewhere in the world, the justification almost necessarily involves a reference to this privileged signifier. When the United States, for instance, wanted to justify the March 20, 2003, invasion of Iraq, the name given to the military action itself indicates the privileged role that the idea of freedom has in current ideological struggles. Rather than labeling the attack Operation Weapons of Mass Destruction or Operation Defend America (identifying the ostensible reasons for the war), the American leadership called it Operation Iraqi Freedom.[1] The freedom being brought to Iraq, like the freedom that neoliberalism celebrates, is only secondarily political freedom. First and foremost, it is the capacity to pursue one's private economic interest without intrusive state regulation.[2] In the contemporary imagination, freedom exists in contrast and in opposition to law, which serves as a brake on individual freedom if collective life is to be possible. Law and regulation are necessary but unfortunate evils that must be minimized in order for individuals to enjoy their freedom to produce and consume.

The response to the economic crisis of 2008 followed directly from the neoliberal understanding of freedom. Remarkably, it took over a year after the crisis for the American Congress to take up the prospect of enacting regulation that might prevent a future collapse, and the types of control passed both in the United States and around the world showed an extreme reluctance to restrict the economic freedom of even those who had helped to bring about the crisis. The economic measures taken to forestall the economic woes—with the exception of the initial (undersized) American stimulus, a singular and highly controversial action—further demonstrated the power of the neoliberal definition of freedom. The plans around the world and especially in Europe called for "austerity" in state spending and an economic policy seemingly informed by the

revived motto of the Tea Party movement: Don't Tread on Me. Despite the deflationary threat that the austerity plans created, governments pursued them because they minimized the state and left the market free. Neoliberal freedom demands that the law simply get out of its way so that capital might tread with greater force on the poor and disempowered.

In one sense, this conception of freedom has its origins in the political philosophy of John Locke, who figured heavily in the thinking of American founders like Thomas Jefferson.[3] Locke posits what he calls the "*Natural Liberty* of Man," which is a right to live without legislative restraint.[4] With this formulation, Locke seems to set natural liberty as the absolute contrary of law or legal authority, but later he asserts, in a way that will contrast with his neoliberal descendants, that law is not opposed to freedom but its guarantor and a vehicle for its development. In the *Second Treatise on Government,* he states, "*The end of Law* is not to abolish or restrain, but *to preserve and enlarge Freedom:* For in all the States of created beings capable of Laws, *where there is no Law, there is no Freedom.*"[5] Rather than seeing an opposition, Locke understands here law as supplementing freedom. But this conception of law becomes too sanguine for the philosophy that animates today's neoliberalism. For someone like Milton Friedman, some law might be necessary to ensure freedom, but this necessity will always also constitute a barrier to freedom, which means that Friedman's project involves minimalizing law in order to maximalize freedom.[6]

In the name of economic and political freedom (which he sees as mutually reinforcing), Friedman condemns even those restrictions on liberty that would seem commonsensical to most people. For instance, Friedman sees the licensing of various occupations as an unnecessary constraint. He notes, "A citizen of the United States who under the laws of various states is not free to follow the occupation of his own choosing unless he can get a license for it, is . . . being deprived of an essential part of his freedom."[7] Basic efforts to regulate public interactions and transactions for the sake of the safety and security of those involved is, according to this perspective, an infringement on freedom. From Locke to Friedman, liberalism's view of the opposition between freedom and law becomes increasingly acute.

The idea that law and freedom exist in an antagonistic relation predominates not just on the Right today but also among many thinkers on the Left. For these theorists, one discovers freedom in those moments and spaces at the margin of the law where figures not fully constituted by the law—bodies, molecular forms, multitudes—engage in acts of resistance to the law's threatening ubiquity. Resistance is here the equivalent

of freedom. The key figure in this movement of resistance against law is Michel Foucault, whose reformulation of the part that law plays in the structuring of subjectivity and society provided a way of understanding the law's vastly expanded reach in modernity. Foucault sees law no longer functioning as simply a force of prohibition as it had in traditional societies but as a productive force. Rather than merely interdicting sex, for example, law begins to produce forms of sex and discourses about sex. As law becomes productive, the space for resisting its reach—the space for freedom—shrinks.

Foucault's inability to conceive of freedom within any relation to law leads to a stunning turn in his late work. The first volume of *The History of Sexuality* tells the story of the birth of the "repressive hypothesis," the illusory idea that law restricts desire rather than producing it. Instead of continuing this narrative in the way that he had originally envisioned, Foucault jumps backward historically almost twenty-five hundred years in the second volume, *The Use of Pleasure.* This volume does not continue the discussion of the production of sexuality or even rehearse a discussion of traditional sexual prohibition. It leaves the domain of law altogether in order to discover a realm of freedom in Greek society. It recounts the sexual freedom that existed in the classical Greek world, where individuals could construct their own subjectivity (and sexuality) without any universal demanding or producing obedience.[8] Foucault makes this radical and unforeseen (even by himself) turn in his work because the classical Greeks provide an instance—or so he comes to believe—of freedom without law. In modernity, it seems, Foucault could find no space where law did not reach thanks to its productive power.

The task for those inspired by Foucault's work is thus a difficult one. Freedom must carve out a position in opposition to the law not only when it appears as a prohibition but also, and much more importantly, in its productive form, which seems to have become ubiquitous. This is the project of Laura Kipnis in her 2003 self-proclaimed polemic *Against Love,* where she lights into the contemporary couple form on the grounds that coupling demands a decisive sociopolitical renunciation of sexual desire and pleasure. For Kipnis, the couple form, as it is promulgated and practiced today, is a giant ideological lie, a commodity that promises love and wholeness but that ultimately reproduces the work ethic and docility that belong to the logic and practice of capitalism. Coupling manifests unfreedom in the guise of the choice of a romantic partner. It is unabashed law masquerading as freedom. As Kipnis sees it, would-be couplers are commanded to pursue conjugal love by virtually every two-dimensional surface (by movie screens, televisions, billboards, and

magazines); and almost anyone already coupled for any length of time is the virtual dupe of ideological narratives that aim either to make us work at our relationships (as if we were not overworked already) or to get us to subscribe or resign ourselves to a version of mature love—that "magical elixir" that Kipnis sardonically quips is the functional equivalent of "denture adhesive."[9]

The heroes in Kipnis's book are adulterous desire and the act of adultery itself. If the conjoined couple is the disciplinary master signifier du jour, the ostensibly natural outcome to which late capitalist subjects are made to aspire, then adultery is that signifier's insurgent—the standard-bearer of a host of pleasures and sensations, and indeed, of a wholly other order of temporality, that is "the basis of utopian thinking" (45) and thus incipiently revolutionary. Kipnis credits adulterers, indeed, with "clogging up the social machinery with their errant desires" (9), likening infidelity to the "sit down strike of the love-takes-work ethic" (31) and to "industrial sabotage" (108). For Kipnis, sexual desire itself is the ineradicable kink in the social order whose illicit exercise reminds us of our radical freedom. As the vehicle of our emancipation, adulterous desire replaces the routine of work and sex with the incomparably more vivifying feelings "of being reinvented[,] of being desired[,] of feeling fascinating" (106)—feelings we surrender in favor of lives of obedient submission and subjugation. In an explicit nod to Foucault, Kipnis writes, "We police ourselves and those we love and call it living happily ever after" (94). The path of adultery is one way of freely sidestepping this self-destructive police action.

On their face, a number of Kipnis's claims have political salience. For one thing, the kind of commodified love against which she rails obviously warrants critique as fantasmatic. That is to say, Kipnis sees how, in late capitalist culture, coupling—and the vision of domesticity with which it is bound up—works hand in glove with extant logics of acquisition and accumulation, never stopping to ponder how those logics might be opposed. The baleful lesson of Danny Boyle's *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) is apposite here, since Boyle's film invites us to celebrate the extent to which the winning of one's beloved is bound up with fantasies of financial security and affluence. It is also indisputably the case, historically, that adulterous desire and adultery have constituted powerful instances of (more often than not) female emancipation against the patriarchal monopolization of sexual pleasure. For feminism and queer theory, to name just these two critical orientations, adultery, indeed, can appear as a way to reclaim the body that is disciplined and policed by the societal norms and institutions. This latter point is apparent in nineteenth-century texts like Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening;* in the figure of the femme fatale in any number of classical noir films; and in more contemporary, non-noir films such as Tony Goldwyn's *A Walk on the Moon* (1999) or Todd Haynes's *Far from Heaven* (2002), both of which invest their depictions of adulterous desire with a political charge meant to contest overly normative social strictures.[10] Despite these seeming examples of adultery's progressive political valence, there are nonetheless reasons to be wary of Kipnis's wholesale valorization of adultery—in particular, her portrait of love as that which emerges as a self-deceptive compensation for the diminished thrills of sexual desire and coupling.

The problem stems from the absolute opposition that Kipnis, like Foucault, sets up between law and freedom. The couple is an unadulterated figure of law, while the adulterer is, on the other side, a pure site of freedom. This conception of law and freedom inherently aligns the free act with what Hegel calls the beautiful soul, a subject whose identity depends on the enemy that it fervently denounces. Without the law of coupling, there would be no free adulterer, and without the production of sex, there would be no possibility for Foucault's celebration of "bodies and pleasures" that throws a wrench in the gears of this productive regime. The law makes freedom possible insofar as it provides a norm to transgress. But even more than this the very establishing of the law out of undifferentiated being marks the emergence of freedom. Freedom is identical with law because law frees the subject—in the act of creating it—from the causality of the natural world.

Both the prevailing Rightist and Leftist versions of freedom miss how freedom emerges from the break that law introduces into the natural world. Though there are, of course, laws of nature, natural beings do not—and are not expected to—obey the law. Natural beings do not represent the laws of nature to themselves so that they might obey or disobey them. No one chides a tiger for killing a gazelle or punishes a Venus flytrap for eating an insect. Though there is incredible violence, there are no crimes in the natural world. Natural laws exist, of course, but because there is no representation of the law—no law in the moral or social sense—there is no freedom. With the introduction of law in the moral or social sense, however, the possibility of acting differently, which is the actuality of freedom, first arises. Law's denaturalizing effect both frees the subject from its dependence on the determinate causality of nature and offers the subject the possibility of freely choosing to obey or disobey the law. But this moment of choice is already just the repetition of the freedom that occurs at the moment when the law cuts into the natural world.

The freedom that we are most familiar with today is the freedom to choose. Most often, we choose between many competing products whose differences are negligible or even, in the case of cold remedies, impossible to determine. The plethora of choices for the consumer indicates the complete absence of any real choice. The freedom to choose between a Toyota and a Honda is certainly the kind of freedom envisaged by Operation Iraqi Freedom. But indulging in this freedom of choice betrays freedom because it necessarily represses the rupture of the law on which authentic freedom depends. Freedom opposed to the law is the absence of freedom. In order to constitute ourselves as free subjects, we must sustain the connection between our freedom and the law seen as a rupture. The philosopher who tries to sustain this position most doggedly is Immanuel Kant, who was the first to recognize that freedom derives from and depends on sustaining a break from natural necessity rather than working around it or simply recognizing it.

Condemned to Kant

When examined in light of antecedents like Locke, Hobbes, or Descartes, the Kantian moral revolution appears completely unanticipated. Whereas these thinkers consistently contrast law and freedom, Kant would bring them together in order to show that freedom has no sense outside the break with nature that law inaugurates.[11] His moral philosophy represents one of the epochal moments in the history of thought, a moment when the received wisdom almost instantly becomes obsolete. But there is one crucial figure who, despite his oft-stated hostility to the strictures of social law, does anticipate the connection that Kant would later fully realize. This figure is Jean-Jacques Rousseau (whom Kant revered).

From our perspective, Rousseau begins his most famous work of political thought, *The Social Contract,* in a most unpromising way. He baldly asserts, "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains."[12] Rousseau appears to regress here from Locke's view of law supplementing freedom into a straightforward expression of absolute opposition. This is the type of statement that one would expect from Milton Friedman or some other champion of neoliberal economics. Rousseau conceives of freedom as the natural state of humanity and the social law to which humanity submits as the alienation of that freedom. Later in *The Social Contract,* however, his thinking becomes much more sophisticated as he distinguishes between natural freedom (which, in truth, has little value) and civil freedom (which occurs only with submission to the law). When Rousseau develops

this idea, natural freedom becomes equated with slavery, completely in opposition to how he formulated things on the first page of *The Social Contract.* He notes, "The impulsion of mere appetite is slavery, and obedience to the law one has prescribed to oneself is freedom."[13] With this Rousseau approaches the Kantian link between the law and freedom, but even Kant himself needed time to finally arrive at this disturbing connection.

For most historians of philosophy, Kant's great breakthrough occurs in the first *Critique,* where he advances a plausible solution to the epistemological problems that had beset Western thought since its origins. By translating the form of objects into a question of the structure of the knowing subject's possible experience, Kant solves the question about our knowledge of the external world by shifting the terrain on which the question might be posed. How we know—the form of the subject's knowledge—gains philosophical primacy over what we might know. Everything we know, we know freely, since if appearances were things in themselves, then nature would be the cause of every event. If the thing in itself continues to pose a difficulty for subsequent thinkers, it is because Kant ceases to grant it any importance himself. The only properly transcendental idea is freedom.[14] According to both the continental and analytic traditions, the philosophical gesture of the *Critique of Pure Reason* outweighs the rest of Kant's thought in intellectual significance.

After completing this major work, Kant turned to moral philosophy, where he seems to make an almost immediate breakthrough with the discovery of the categorical imperative in the 1785 *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals.* In its first formulation, the categorical imperative demands the universalization of our maxim of action in order to verify its morality. A maxim that we cannot universalize without contradiction—something like "Steal whenever you think you won't be caught"—violates the categorical imperative and is immoral. The universalization of this maxim would lead to a world in which the very act of stealing would be impossible because there would be no secure property at all. In the end, the morality that Kant comes up with seems pretty disappointing. Contrasted with an epoch-creating theoretical philosophy, the practical philosophy betrays an obvious bias toward bourgeois individualism and its requisite private property, as even Hegel, himself no socialist, would point out. But there is a radicality to Kant's moral philosophy that goes beyond his theoretical revolution. One cannot find it when he first introduces the categorical imperative but only years later, when he revises his thinking about morality.

In his initial formulation of the categorical imperative in *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals,* Kant tries to argue from the existence of

the subject's freedom to the necessity of obeying the moral law. That is, he contends that we must obey the moral law because we are free beings. Since we can obey, we should obey. The problem with this formulation, however, is that morality does not necessarily follow from freedom. The rationality of the bond between them eludes Kant in the *Groundwork,* and as long as he thinks of freedom as prior to the law, he will fail to see their connection. Even though the most famous formulations of Kantian morality are already articulated in the *Groundwork,* its conception of freedom remains pre-Kantian.[15]

The great breakthrough occurs in 1788 in the second *Critique, The Critique of Practical Reason,* where Kant conceives the existence of and our interest in the law as the proof of our freedom. We see that we can act differently (that we are free) at the moment when we experience a compulsion to act differently (thanks to the moral law). The law allows us to break from our natural or conditioned inclinations and thereby establish our autonomy as subjects. The mere fact that I represent the law to myself—what Kant calls the fact of reason—is the index of my freedom. This representation of the law, whatever my ultimate choice might be, already disrupts the chain of natural causality through its very existence. As a result, the freedom that it provides *cannot be illusory.* Freedom exists before the choice, with the emergence of the representation of the moral law as such.

In the second *Critique,* Kant discovers the basis of freedom, and in this way his moral philosophy transcends in importance all his theoretical insights. Prior to Kant, philosophers posited human freedom or argued on behalf of it, but none thought that they could prove it, nor did any link freedom to the law. With his understanding of the significance of the subject giving itself the law, Kant shows that freedom must exist. When one gives oneself the law, one does so completely against natural or culturally conditioned inclinations.[16] Though of course it emerges from the natural world, the order of representation produces the law that compels subjects to act against their natural instincts or at least to admit the possibility of doing so. The act of representing the law to oneself removes the subject from the world of nature and necessity and simultaneously reveals the self-division or incompletion of this world. If necessity functioned without a hitch (as it does for Spinoza, for instance), no being would ever arise who could give itself a law, but there is a hitch—and this hitch is the free subject.

The introduction of law is simultaneously the introduction of a new causality in which freedom, not nature, is determinative. According to Kant's formulation, "Freedom, the causality of which is determinable only through the law, consists just in this: that it restricts all inclinations, and consequently the esteem of the person himself, to the condition of compliance with its pure law."[17] The violent disturbance that the imposition of the law produces in the subject results in the complete alienation of the subject from its own inclinations, but this alienation is at once freedom insofar as all the subject's inclinations indicate its fundamental dependence on the natural world or on the tradition that it has inherited.[18] As Kant comes to recognize in the second *Critique,* only the law has the power to create this break and give birth to the free subject because only the law creates the possibility of acting against an inclination without simply privileging a competing inclination.

The apparent inconsistency in Kant's account of freedom is in the heavy lifting that it requires law to perform. Whereas all inclinations come from sources external to the subject (natural or social conditions), laws can come from outside or from the subject itself. Hypothetical imperatives or laws of pragmatic utility tie the subject to externality because one performs them for the sake of a result achieved in the world. Any law of reciprocity fits this type. If, for example, a law tells me to tolerate the speech of others so that they will tolerate mine, I am operating in the domain of the hypothetical imperative. Following such imperatives does not lead to autonomy or freedom but instead always returns the subject to a dependent status. The reaction or response of others plays an integral part in the hypothetical imperative.

This is the problem with utilitarianism as a moral philosophy. The utilitarian does a much better job than Kant of working to make the world a nicer place for more people. But this thinker does so from a position of complete dependence. Utilitarianism is irreconcilable with autonomy. The utilitarian philosopher makes moral decisions on the basis of a good end, but these choices never interrupt the world of necessity. Noted utilitarian John Stuart Mill provides a concise definition of the utilitarian position. He claims, "The utilitarian doctrine is, that happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end; all other things being desirable only as means to that end."[19] Mill does not question what constitutes happiness but simply accepts it and works on its behalf. Utilitarians such as Mill accommodate themselves to necessity through their total devotion to the hypothetical imperative.

The categorical imperative, in contrast, forces the subject to eschew any calculation based on others, and in this way it provides the specific form of law, as Kant sees it, that frees the subject from all dependence. The key component of the categorical imperative—and the essence of its link to freedom—is the demand that it function without any trace of

pathological interest. That is, the subject must not use the categorical imperative in order to advance its own self-interest or even to advance the self-interest of others. Decisions about the categorical imperative must not make reference to consequences because consequences necessarily involve the subject with externality. The categorical imperative is a contentless form of duty, a pure form that coincides with subjectivity itself.[20] Along these same lines, five years after the second *Critique,* Kant, in his *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason,* derides statutory or clerical religious practice for its belief that one must undertake this or that ritual or duty for its ostensible reward—appearing well pleasing to God or earning some reward in the hereafter. For Kant, acts designed to make one appear well pleasing to God "possess no moral worth in themselves, hence are actions extracted only through fear or hope—the kind which also an evil human being can perform."[21] Such acts are not truly free.

The subject is not a wealth of contents or of various identities; it is rather the form that accompanies these contents while remaining irreducible to them. Any attempt to identify subjectivity with its contents moors subjectivity to the external conditions—social, biological, political, and so on—that produce it. Only form can be autonomous. This is what Descartes grasps when he proposes an act of thinking that he can abstract from every particular thought. Like the subject, the categorical imperative separates itself from all positive content. It is only with this imperative that the subject finds itself and can articulate itself as a pure form—and thus as free. The emptiness of Kant's categorical imperative testifies to its connection with the subject's achievement of freedom from dependence and to its rupture with the rest of the world. Kant's discovery of the formal nature of the moral law leads him to the discovery of the subject's freedom, though years would intervene between the first discovery in the *Groundwork* and the second in *Critique of Practical Reason.*

It is true, however, that Kant himself retreats from the purely formal status of the categorical imperative and tries to imbue it with a content appropriate to the form. But this proves impossible, which is why Kant has to write three versions of the categorical imperative rather than a single one. That is to say, there are three expressions of the content of the categorical imperative because there are really none. The command to will that one's action would become a universal law, the requirement that others should always be treated as ends and never just as a means, and the requirement that one's maxim fit within a kingdom of ends—each of these formulations of the categorical imperative attempts to articulate the purity of formal duty but all fall short. In each case, a content foreign to the subject impinges on the subject's freedom. It is not the content of

the law that frees the subject but the form, and whatever content the law has leaves the subject in dependence or what Kant calls heteronomy. Any positive content obscures the law's rupture with the given.

Confronted with the pure form of duty, I inevitably ask, what is the content of my duty? How should I act in a particular situation? But as a pure form, the moral law should provide me with no respite. I must act without recourse to pathological motives, but I must decide what this involves, what the positive content of my duty is. By supplying formulas for the moral law, Kant lets the subject off the hook and introduces a calculus by which the subject can arrive at the proper decision. But this is already to miss the point: freedom lies not in the correct decision or in any result whatsoever but in the opening that breaks from natural causality. The subject must take up the burden of this rupture for itself, without any guidance from the discoverer of the break.

The form of the law demands that the subject do its duty regardless of its pathological attachments. But the form of law does not prescribe what this duty is: it does not supply a content. Of course, all laws acquire a content at some point. But the point is that the aspect of the law that violently disrupts the causality of the natural world and that thereby liberates the subject is nothing but its form. The form of the moral law gives the subject freedom by way of its rupture from all natural constraints. This rupture enables the subject to act freely against its nature and against its culture. Every positive content of the law works to obscure the law's form and this form's liberating effect. The task of thought after Kant is to orient ourselves toward this obscured form and to uncover the freedom that inheres in it.

Eighth Rule of Fight Club

The Kantian moral law is a form of violence that the subject performs on itself. It is this violence, this act of negation, that frees the subject from the bounds of nature and tradition. All freedom has its roots in violence of this type. This is what Frantz Fanon grasps in the *Wretched of the Earth,* where he insists that decolonization must be violent because it must tear the colonized subjects out of their psychic situation of dependence. Nonviolent decolonization leaves subjects psychically tied to the existing order, whereas violence inaugurates a break. As Fanon puts it, "At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect."[22] The violence of the colonized subject

not only topples the colonial order but also reveals this subject's capacity for self-creation. The novelty of every subject—its defining singularity—is inextricable from its proclivity for violence. Just as Fanon famously proclaims that "decolonization is always a violent phenomenon," one could equally expand this assertion by saying that freedom is always violent.[23]

But the primary violence of freedom is not aimed at others but at the self. Through the rupture with the givens of our being, we assert our freedom from the context out of which we emerge. This rupture does not, however, make us the masters of our situation. We are not sovereign beings free to dominate our world. The common association of freedom with sovereignty leads us to misunderstand the structure of freedom. In fact, the rupturing loss that creates our subjectivity also deprives us of any sense of mastery over ourselves or others. By repeating the subject's inaugural violent gesture of self-wounding, one abandons the terrain of mastery altogether and experiences the groundlessness of one's subjectivity. It is in this groundlessness that one is free. Perhaps the greatest visual depiction of the freedom that comes from self-wounding occurs in David Fincher's *Fight Club* (1999).

Fight Club begins by creating an illusory association of freedom with aggressive violence in the fashion of *Natural Born Killers* (Oliver Stone, 1994). When conservatives celebrated Chuck Palahniuk's novel for finally freeing men from social engineering designed to stigmatize manliness and to erode the differences between men and women, they fell prey to this illusion.[24] Such conservatives read literally the claim that "what you see at fight club is a generation of men raised by women." But *Fight Club* concludes by revealing that this aggressive violence hides a more original rupturing violence. The film seduces the spectator with the pleasure of the apparently aggressive violence that occurs in fight club. One sees a series of brutal fights in which two combatants beat each other violently, and the film provides a graphic depiction of this aggressive violence. But the formal structure of *Fight Club* enacts a rupturing violence on the spectator with the revelation that the film's two protagonists (the cofounders of fight club) are really the same person. This revelation forces us to see fight club in an entirely new light: not as an exercise in aggressive violence toward others but as violence directed toward the self in an effort to reproduce a rupturing loss.

As we see that the idea behind fight club is receiving violence rather than enacting aggression, we experience a rupturing negation ourselves as spectators through the film's formal shift that uproots our secure viewing position. That is, the violence that the film's protagonist perpetuates on himself finds a formal parallel in the violence that the spectator suffers at

the hands of the film itself. The dramatic shift in perspective that reveals the initial fights as the film's protagonist beating himself up rather than fighting with his friend is an assault on the spectator. It forces us to see the film's violence in a wholly different light and to link the subject's emancipation with self-inflicted violence instead of with typical externally directed violence. In contrast to a film like *Natural Born Killers* (where one takes pleasure in random external violence), one cannot watch *Fight Club* from a safe distance. The film strips away the mastery of spectatorship and demands a confrontation with a foundational violence that frees the subject.

Fight Club suggests the revolutionary potential of self-inflicted violence by showing how this violence leads to an attempt to topple the society's capitalist infrastructure.[25] We see in fight club a suspension of the hierarchies and simulations of the corporate and consumer world: a kid in the copy center gets to beat up an account representative, and the scars from fighting are genuine, not a copy of a copy of a copy. The film's hero can attack this infrastructure because he has first attacked himself and thereby freed himself from his attachment to capitalist society. At the beginning of the film, the hero lives in a highly stylized modern apartment stuffed with pricey furnishings that he has compulsively purchased from mail-order catalogs. In a particularly revelatory traveling shot, Fincher moves the camera around the apartment and focuses on the various furnishings—lamps, chairs, desks, and so on—while including their price and catalog description in the image. This shot highlights the hero's investment in the commodity as such and his fundamental lack of freedom. He exists within the illusory autonomy of the contemporary consumer, which is in fact a full-fledged heteronomy.

The hero's first step toward freedom consists in blowing up his apartment, though this occurs early in the film, and it is not clear to the spectator that he is responsible. He moves from the destruction of his property to his physical self-destruction when he forms fight club with the imaginary Tyler Durden. Though fight club appears as an experience of mutual self-destruction, it actually begins with the film's hero beating himself up in a parking lot. In the act of pummeling himself, the hero shatters his ideal ego. The blows deprive him of any idealized image and separate him from his status in capitalist society. Self-inflicted violence strips the subject down to what it doesn't have as a possession—its freedom. As a result, this violence insulates the subject against the blandishments of capitalist society, which always promise the possibility of finding and thus having the object. The radicality of *Fight Club* consists in its making the connection between violence and freedom explicit in the way that Kant does.

Fight Club is indeed an exceptional film, but it does not stand alone. There are, in fact, a series of recent films that align violence with the emergence of free subjectivity and attempt to inflict this violence on the spectator. Jane Campion's *In the Cut* (2003), Christopher Nolan's *The Prestige* (2006), and Darren Aronofsky's *The Wrestler* (2008) all focus on the foundational self-destructiveness that gives birth to subjectivity and attempt to integrate this self-inflicted violence into their formal structure. In each case, violence directed toward the self becomes not just part of the film's content but also a way that this content spills over into the form and thereby challenges any possible mastery in spectatorship. This link between self-inflicted violence in the content and an assault on the spectator in the form is especially apparent in *The Wrestler,* a film even more difficult for the spectator than *Fight Club.*

The difficulty of watching *The Wrestler* doesn't stem only from the brutality of the violence, such as when a fellow wrestler breaks a chair over the head of Randy the Ram (Mickey Rourke) or when another assaults him with a staple gun and broken glass. Though the violence is depicted graphically, many films are far more explicit. What separates *The Wrestler* from other graphic films is the link between Randy's own freedom as a subject and this violence. Randy is not only a victim of his wrestling opponents or unscrupulous promoters, but the violence is also the way that he frees himself from the dreary finitude of his world. This world's dreariness is such that he will place his hand into a meat slicer in order to flee it. When freedom is purchased at such a cost, it is impossible to watch in the usual way. As a spectator, one cannot remain at a distance from the film's violence because it is integral to the subjectivity of the film's protagonist. If one embraces Randy, one must at the same time embrace the self-destructive violence to which he submits himself.

In the final scene of the film, Randy participates in a match despite the knowledge that his weakened heart will most likely not withstand the intensity of the contest and that he will die as a result. On the one hand, the film depicts Randy's decision to wrestle as one in a series of self-destructive acts. But on the other, the film shows Randy enjoying his freedom in the match despite its potential cost for him. *The Wrestler* ends in the middle of this match with Randy jumping through the air to body slam his opponent, an ending that leaves his ultimate fate in question. Aronofsky ends the film with Randy between life and death in order not to create a morality tale condemning Randy's self-destructiveness. This ending aligns the spectator with the self-destructive violence itself and doesn't provide a position from which the spectator might gain distance from this violence in the way that the moralizing ending would.

Aronofsky's film reveals the nature of our investment in violence by showing its role in constituting our freedom. The aesthetic depiction of Randy's self-inflicted violence offers us the opportunity to take some aesthetic pleasure in the painful freedom of violence. This places the film, along with *Fight Club* and others, in the ranks of contemporary cinema that fights the ideological deployment of violence by turning the violence back on its spectators—and thereby working to free spectators in the same way that Randy frees himself.

The Contingent Hannah Arendt

Along with Jean-Paul Sartre, Hannah Arendt is the great philosophical apostle of freedom in the twentieth century. Unlike Sartre, however, Arendt never seeks to marry her conception of freedom with Marxism's sense of necessity, which is perhaps the reason for her hostility to Sartre, despite their shared concern for freedom. Arendt's devotion to freedom might seem strange if one considers her first and foremost as the student of Martin Heidegger, for whom freedom is not a central issue.[26] But the main philosophical influence on Arendt is not Heidegger but Kant. The fact that Arendt grew up in Königsberg, the city identified philosophically with Kant, functions as an objective correlative. Throughout Arendt's career as a thinker, Kant recurs as a touchstone, as the philosopher who comes closest, in Arendt's mind, to grasping the human condition accurately. At the time of her death, Arendt was in fact working on a book on Kant that would have constituted the third and final volume of her *Life of the Mind.*[27] Much of what constitutes Kant's appeal for Arendt is his insistence on human freedom. In contrast to the later philosophers of German idealism and its aftermath who see the task of philosophy as one of reconciling itself with necessity, Kant, as Arendt sees it, avoids this trap.[28] It is thus from a Kantian standpoint that she launches her critique of Hegel and Marx, thinkers who eliminate the space for freedom by overcoming the inextricable divide that Kant identifies between being and thinking.

Like Kant, Arendt locates the subject's freedom in its rupture from natural being. In contrast to Kant, however, Arendt sees this rupture occurring not with the subject giving itself the law but with the subject's birth. Natality occupies a pivotal position in Arendt's thought. It is the rupture that constitutes human animals as free subjects. Natality breaks with the past and inserts new human singularities into the world. Though other animals are also born, Arendt sees human birth as exceptional. It defies the natural order from which it emerges and thereby produces freedom.

But Arendt confines this freedom to the political realm. There is no such thing as economic or social freedom in Arendt's philosophy. Unlike thinkers such as Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman for whom the only freedom is economic freedom, Arendt insists that the only freedom is political freedom. Necessity governs the economic world with no room for deviation (because, according to Arendt, the economic world is nothing but the site for the reproduction of life). But in the political realm subjects can act freely and determine how they will govern themselves. As Arendt notes in *Between Past and Future,* "The freedom of the political realm begins after all elementary necessities of sheer living have been mastered by rule, so that domination and subjection, command and obedience, ruling and being ruled, are preconditions for establishing the political realm precisely because they are not its content."[29] The freedom of the political realm exists, for Arendt, through the break from the demands of life that constitute the economy. Politics is a world apart, a world in which our natural being has no role. In this sense, she remains a follower of Kant and his conception of freedom. Freedom exists in the rupture from natural necessity, though not exactly where Kant locates this rupture. Arendt sees this occurring with the constitution of the political realm rather than with the institution of the law. Arendt confines freedom to the realm of politics because she theorizes it as completely opposed to necessity, whereas Kant's formulation admits some overlap between freedom and necessity.

Arendt refuses Kant's attempt to ground freedom in the rupture of the law because of her identification of freedom with contingency rather than necessity. Although it is Kant's ability to avoid the trap of necessity ensnaring Hegel and Marx that draws Arendt to him, he doesn't escape it thoroughly enough when he accounts for the origin of freedom. The law, according to Kant, imposes a necessity on the subject, and this new necessity represents a rupture from natural necessity. Arendt, for her part, insists that the free act can have nothing to do with the necessity of law but must be entirely contingent. In the second volume of *The Life of the Mind,* she claims, "The touchstone of a free act . . . is always that we know that we could also have left undone what we actually did."[30] Here, freedom is the freedom to do what one wills, a conception of freedom that fails to grapple with the extent to which ideology dictates what the subject wills. As F. W. J. Schelling points out in his masterpiece *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom,* the fact that we don't know why we have done what we did in no way ensures that it is not determined rather than free. Schelling notes, "Exactly where lack of knowledge enters, determination takes place all the more certainly."[31]

When we believe that we could have acted otherwise, this most likely indicates the opposite.

Arendt's attempt to align freedom with contingency impoverishes her idea of freedom. According to Schelling, "If freedom is to be saved by nothing other than the complete contingency of actions, then it is not to be saved at all."[32] What Schelling recognizes here is that necessity—or what we would come to call ideology—is at work unconsciously and often uses the apparent contingency to enact its determination.[33] Throughout her many accounts of freedom, Arendt never confronts the problem of ideology, a problem that threatens to besmirch the apparently spontaneous and contingent act that constitutes freedom for Arendt. In order to break from the power of tradition and ideology, we require not only human spontaneity, as Arendt would have it, but also the force of law, which is why Kant theorizes law as the path to freedom.

Without the rupture of the law, the subject remains within the givens of its world, and even the fact of natality does not disrupt these givens. The subject is not born as a spontaneous blank slate but into an ideologically constituted world in which it must gain its bearings. It will always do so through the terms that others and ideology give to it. Arendt rightly sees the importance of the link between rupture and freedom, but her inability to see how freedom might require necessity in order to break from necessity limits her theory of freedom. Ironically, it is the thoroughgoing nature of Arendt's commitment to freedom that ends up leading to her inability to conceive the breadth of the subject's freedom.

Waiting for Modernity

Though the definition of freedom is often contested, few today dispute its desirability. Perhaps they would not go to the extremes of punching themselves in the face in order to free themselves from external necessity, but almost everyone pursues some form of freedom. We continue to live in the epoch in which Hegel can proclaim, "The History of the World is nothing but the development of the Idea of Freedom."[34] Hegel's apotheosis of freedom in *The Philosophy of History* creates the impression that it has always had a foundational status as a political value, and its current ubiquity provides confirmation. But freedom is not simply difficult to achieve. It is also difficult to conceive: in order to come up with the idea of freedom, one must psychically topple the dominance of the authority of tradition. Freedom requires a rupture from tradition. Prior to modernity, tradition had an authority that squelched aspirations of freedom

before they germinated. For all their anticipation of modern philosophical concerns, the Greeks of antiquity did not concern themselves with freedom. The problem is a specifically modern one.

Though Kant was the first philosopher to conceptualize the subject's freedom as the break from the world of necessity, he had a literary predecessor. Through the figure of Hamlet, Shakespeare depicts the turn away from the authority of tradition and toward freedom. Despite the many determining factors that weigh on Hamlet's actions in the play, his character refuses to be guided by an external causality. Hamlet disturbs spectators and readers of the play because his incessant pursuit of freedom reveals its cost. Until someone like Shakespeare could appreciate this cost, it was impossible to recognize the value of freedom.

Approximately four years before he wrote *Hamlet,* Shakespeare wrote a much more traditional revenge tragedy. A mother, Tamora, orders her sons to avenge their dead brother by killing the man responsible for his death, Titus Andronicus. The sons, Chiron and Demetrius, take up this task without the least hesitation or question. For them, the command issued by a traditional authority (their mother) has an absolute status and produces an immediate obedience. In *Hamlet,* there is a similar willingness to obey the authority of tradition and seek vengeance when Claudius confronts Laertes with the killing of his father. When Claudius asks Laertes, "What would you undertake / to show yourself your father's son in deed / More than in words?" Laertes replies, "To cut his throat i' th' church."[35] Laertes doesn't simply say he would do anything to perform his duty relative to his father; he expresses his willingness to be damned for the sake of this duty. This complete commitment to vengeance when traditional authority demands it, revealed both in *Titus Andronicus* and in the figure of Laertes, shows the power that this authority has over those subject to it. Hamlet's reluctance to obey his dead father's command represents a new development and the implicit eclipse of tradition.

The newness of Hamlet is displayed not just in contrast with characters from *Titus Andronicus* and with Laertes. He inspires so much scholarly activity because his freedom changes the terrain on which subjects operate and, at the same time, continues to be a problem for even present-day readers and spectators. It is difficult to make out the origin of this freedom and to understand why it manifests itself in the way that it does. The freedom of Hamlet gives his actions an almost indecipherable character, both for others in the play and for audiences. Critics will continue to write about Hamlet as long as freedom itself remains perplexing, as long as it fails to fit into a calculus of causes and effects.

The fact that the emergence of freedom first appears in a revenge tragedy is not at all coincidental. Tradition exercises its authority by inserting subjects in an unending cycle of vengeance. The law of vengeance proclaims the worthlessness of the individual subject in the face of the web of tradition into which the individual is born. The individual must avenge her or his predecessor rather than commencing a new epoch that breaks from the past. The demand for vengeance firmly roots the subjects who adhere to it in their world, and it allows no room for subjects to interrupt this world's predominance. By locating Hamlet's freedom within the genre of the revenge tragedy, Shakespeare constitutes freedom on the home turf of traditional authority, which makes Hamlet's break all the more remarkable.

Hamlet has no place within the genre in which he appears. He functions as the paradigmatic free subject because he refuses to take up unquestioningly the path given to him by his father's ghost—the path taken in *Titus Andronicus.* The dead father is, as Freud notes in *Totem and Taboo,* the fundamental figure of traditional authority.[36] It is the dead father rather than the living one who keeps subjects in their assigned places. Rather than act in the way that the dead father commands, Hamlet delays and questions. Hamlet's freedom consists in his break from the law handed down by the dead father and his adherence to an internal law that seeks its own form of justice.

Almost every interpreter of *Hamlet* comments on and tries to explain Hamlet's delay in killing Claudius even after he has assembled convincing proof. The best readings of the play link Hamlet's hesitation to something fundamental in his character or to his profound philosophical insight. According to Ernest Jones (elaborating on a brief discussion by Sigmund Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams*), "The call of duty to kill his stepfather cannot be obeyed because it links itself with the unconscious call of his nature to kill his mother's husband, whether this is the first or the second; the absolute 'repression' of the former impulse involves the inner prohibition of the latter also."[37] Hamlet cannot kill Claudius because the latter is in the position of the father and thus activates his unconscious desire for parricide. The command from his father, as Jones sees it, brings this unconscious desire to light and thereby triggers revulsion—and the inability to act.[38]

Whereas Jones sees Hamlet as a typical subject brought into an atypical situation, Friedrich Nietzsche credits Hamlet with incredible insight that few subjects acquire. In this way, Nietzsche comes close to seeing Hamlet as a paradigm for freedom, but Nietzsche continues to see his

hesitation as a reluctance to act. Nietzsche claims, "Knowledge kills action; action requires one to be shrouded in a veil of illusion—this is the lesson of Hamlet, not that cheap wisdom about Jack the Dreamer who does not get around to acting because he reflects too much, out of an excess of possibilities, as it were. No, it is not reflection, it is true knowledge, insight into the terrible truth, which outweighs every motive for action."[39] The hesitation, in this interpretation, becomes a virtue rather than a failing. We would like to push the analysis of the play even further in this direction. Hamlet's delay reveals that freedom consists not in any positive action but in the rupture from the external law of tradition.

Hamlet is a revenge tragedy that depicts the interruption of revenge with a series of questions designed to realize justice rather than simple vengeance. The laws of necessity govern the traditional revenge tragedy and the logic of vengeance itself. There is a strict—and endless—causality, but no freedom. Rather than accepting the word of his father's ghost as a cause for his subsequent actions, Hamlet decides to investigate the charges in order to become the cause of his own action. When he acts, it must not be the result of an external command but an imperative that he has given to himself. This is why, from the perspective of his father's ghost, it appears in act 3 as if he has lost track of his purpose. Hamlet's freedom is in his refusal to accept authority's command even as he proclaims his fealty to the dead father.[40]

The staging of the play within the play is Hamlet's manner of putting Claudius on trial. He doesn't seek material evidence but a psychic revelation of guilt. Truth, for Hamlet, exists on the level of desire, and when Claudius interrupts the performance of *The Murder of Gonzago* and calls for light, the truth of his desire—his culpability for the murder of Hamlet's father—becomes apparent. But even after this revelation, Hamlet delays because his freedom resides in not acting, in refusing to submit to the causality of vengeance. Harold Bloom rightly points to Hamlet's "negative power." According to Bloom, "He inaugurates the situation in which each of us has to be our own worst enemy."[41] Hamlet turns against himself in order to avoid becoming the dupe of tradition.

Hamlet's difficulty is exactly that of the modern subject. This subject's freedom consists in rejecting the external command and in not acting. To act is to succumb to the external world and to accept the rules that govern it. But refusing to act altogether cannot realize freedom because it leaves the subject at the mercy of the external world. The refusal to act is ultimately the refusal of rupture in all its implications. This is the bind that confronts Hamlet and the modern subject. The subject that preserves a merely internal freedom makes the mistake that Hegel recounts in his

discussion of Stoicism: this stoical subject's internal freedom is purely formal and must turn to action if it is to acquire a content. The great problem of freedom is how to translate the freedom of the internal refusal of traditional authority into a positive act. Here again, Hamlet is instructive.

After Claudius banishes Hamlet and believes he is sending him to his death, Hamlet encounters Fortinbras's army marching on Poland and has a transformative revelation. When he sees the large army on the move, he assumes that the stake in the battle is large. But a solider tells him, "We go to gain a little patch of ground / That hath in it no profit but the name. / So pay five ducats, five, I would not farm it."[42] At this precise moment, Hamlet undergoes a profound change that enables him to act freely rather than freely delay. This transformation is consonant with taking up the Kantian moral law. For Kant, morality is sublime: it consists in the act of sublimation that renders the moral object more valuable than all other objects.[43] When Hamlet encounters Fortinbras's army on the attack, he witnesses the logic of sublimation at work.

In his attack on Poland, Fortinbras has given supreme importance to a meaningless piece of land, and it is this act of granting importance, this sublimation, that creates value. Value, Hamlet recognizes here, does not inhere in any object but must be produced by the subject itself.[44] Hamlet notes that human greatness emerges when one can "find quarrel in a straw / When honor's at stake."[45] Hamlet recognizes that questioning and delay are not enough to constitute freedom. One must also act on behalf of an object that has worth solely via the subject's act of giving it worth. This type of act isn't a capitulation to external necessity but a way of cutting a hole in it.

Unlike the typical character in the revenge tragedy subjected to traditional authority, Hamlet doesn't assert the intrinsic worth of the act of vengeance. It must gain this value through the subject's own free act of sublimation. Without this understanding of sublimation, Hamlet's turn to action at the end of the play would signal his retreat into the logic of revenge and the dominance of authority that he interrupted by his hesitation. But Hamlet's intervention continues his interruption of authority rather than putting an end to it.

After his return to Elsinore, Hamlet is able to kill Claudius during a sword fight with Laertes. Though this act fulfills his dead father's command, Hamlet has left the realm of vengeance altogether. He kills Claudius even though he knows that it will not redeem his father's death or appease an external authority or restore balance to the world. He does it knowing that it matters only for himself. The value of this act, Hamlet recognizes, stems from the subject that performs it. Hamlet finds a way to

reconcile the freedom that comes from the rupture with external authority with the free act in the external world.

Hamlet's example is revelatory because he brings together both sides of the freedom that resides in rupture: he interrupts the imperative to act, and yet he also acts in order to interrupt the triumphant march of external necessity. Freedom must turn its back on external authority, but it cannot become mere freedom of thought, which is the risk that Hamlet runs. In order to be free, one must refrain from acting, and one must act. In the end, Hamlet is able to accomplish both, as are the great figures of modern civil disobedience who emerge in his wake.

The Law of Civil Disobedience

The idea informing civil disobedience from Henry David Thoreau and Mohandas Gandhi to Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela is that one breaks the oppressive constraints of external authority by imposing a more exigent internal law on oneself. Though the proponents of civil disobedience renounce physical violence, they do not renounce the violence of rupture. In fact, they believe that nonviolent resistance has the ability to accomplish a more radical and enduring rupture than does violence itself. Figures like Gandhi and King eschew violence because they associate it with the ruling order. As long as one responds to violence with violence and with the perpetuation of the logic of the ruling order, there can be no authentic freedom. Freedom depends on giving oneself a different form of law, one that breaks with the merely external power of traditional authority.

This becomes most evident in the case of Gandhi, who helped to free India from British rule by means of the exacting law that he imposes on himself. In order to conceptualize this law, which is his form of civil disobedience, Gandhi employs the term "satyagraha," which brings together the Sanskrit words for "truth" and "firmness."[46] Satyagraha is opposed, as Gandhi sees it, to passive resistance. It is an active practice used by the strong, those strong enough to take up the self-limitation of a strict law. Though the external law is oppressive, the most effective way to counter it, according to Gandhi, is by adopting an even more demanding, internal law. Through satyagraha, one can find freedom even in the most oppressive situation. Even while one endures the punishment that the external law requires, one does not submit to its dictates. The satyagrahi (one who takes up satyagraha) ceases to recognize the force of the external law because she or he recognizes its injustice. By rejecting the ruling order and at

the same time respecting its power to punish, satyagraha remains nonviolent, but it also hopes to change the very terrain of the battle by changing the oppressors psychically rather than injuring them physically. An injured oppressor often becomes more oppressive, but a converted oppressor abandons the oppressive actions altogether, or so Gandhi believed.

While Gandhi insists on the nonviolent nature of satyagraha, he simultaneously points out its revolutionary ambitions. He writes, "My creed is non-violence under all circumstances. My method is conversion, not coercion; it is self-suffering, not the suffering of the tyrant. . . . My ambition is much higher than independence. Through the deliverance of India, I seek to deliver the so-called weaker races of the earth from the crushing heels of Western exploitation in which England is the greatest partner."[47] Like Marx or Lenin, Gandhi envisions a worldwide revolution, and the act of giving oneself a law that interrupts the reign of external traditional authority—in the way that the Kantian subject gives itself the moral law—is the primary axis of this revolution.

Satyagraha contains the hope of inaugurating a fundamental and lasting change in the social order. Whereas violence may lead to a temporary victory against forces of oppression, it almost always leads to future reprisals and long cycles of violence. Nonviolent satyagraha, however, interrupts the cycle of violence and attempts to establish a new order on a different basis. In terms of the blow it implies against existing social relations, satyagraha is much more violent than armed struggle. Rather than just defeating or killing the oppressors, it demands their complete psychic and political transformation. Its task is thus much more difficult, but its aims are much higher.

Even if satyagraha doesn't work and the oppression continues, the satyagrahi nonetheless discovers freedom from the oppressive law. As Gandhi puts it, "We can . . . free ourselves of the unjust rule of the Government by defying the unjust rule and accepting the punishments that go with it."[48] Satyagraha makes clear the link between the interruption of the law of external authority and the discovery of freedom. But in fact on many occasions satyagraha had extraordinary effects. In order to protest a British tax on salt, Gandhi engaged in almost a monthlong march from his ashram near Ahmedabad to Dandi, where salt was made. When he arrived, Gandhi made salt and refused to pay the tax. The result was that the British jailed him and many thousands of Indians with him. Though there were no immediate benefits like the lifting of the salt tax, most scholars believe that the Salt Satyagraha was a pivotal moment in Indian independence because it made the idea of this independence a possibility for the first time for many British onlookers.

The success of the Salt Satyagraha and the nonviolence of the satyagraha in general creates an appealing impression. But when confronted with Gandhi's advice to Jews under Hitler or the Allies fighting Nazi Germany, the limits of the satyagraha become evident. Gandhi's belief, stated before the launching of the Final Solution, that Hitler would capitulate to Jewish nonviolent protest and renounce anti-Semitism seems laughable today. One cannot adopt nonviolence as an absolute principle, not just because of the existence of Nazism or related political movements but also because nonviolent protest contradicts itself.

As we have tried to show, even—and especially—the most committed proponents of nonviolence are trying to achieve a violent rupture: the radical transformation of the way that human society organizes itself. Such a transformation would require the elimination of numerous professions, the abolition of various laws, and the renunciation of many long-cherished values. Gandhi wants to create a world in which the wealthy nations will have lost a major source of their riches, along with their cherished belief in their own righteousness. The changes that the advocates of nonviolence desire all imply profound violence, even if this violence is most often psychic.

This is what Slavoj Žižek is getting at when he claims that Gandhi was a more violent political figure than Hitler. In a clarifying response to a review accusing him of anti-Semitism and fondness for Hitler, Žižek contrasts the break that Gandhi occasions with what Hitler attempts. Žižek claims, "In this precise sense of violence, *Gandhi was more violent than Hitler:* Gandhi's movement effectively endeavored to interrupt the basic functioning of the British colonial state."[49] In contrast, Nazism destroyed millions of lives in order to avoid any interruption in the order of things, in order to avoid any authentic rupture.[50] Hitler acts with physical violence so that the ruling order will stay the same, while Gandhi's physical nonviolence seeks a violent break with this order.

If nonviolence is simply not tenable as a first principle, the freeing break that satyagraha accomplishes is. One can appreciate Gandhi's insistence on the rupture without either accepting or rejecting his insistence on nonviolence. Even as he engages in a revolutionary struggle to free India from British colonial rule, he never defines freedom in a purely external manner. Freeing India from the British would never be enough. As Ronald Terchek points out in his analysis of Gandhi's conception of autonomy, "Gandhi problematizes the idea that national independence is sufficient as a goal for self-governance or that it automatically will lead to all kinds of good things. For him, the issue is whether individual Indians will rule themselves."[51] Like Kant, Gandhi views the act of giving a law to oneself

as the true measure of freedom, equally as important as destroying the yoke of an oppressive rule. Without the internal break, the external oppressive force will live on even if it adopts a new guise.

The identification of freedom with rupture necessitates a specific idea of freedom. It cannot be the commonsensical freedom to do whatever one wants. When one does what one wants, one remains within the dictates of the externally imposed law, whether in the act of obeying or transgressing that law. Those neoliberal champions of freedom who do what they want serve either the necessity of nature or the rule of cultural tradition. The only way to escape this servitude is to interrupt it by giving a law to oneself. Though the content of this law varies, freedom exists in the form itself. The form of the self-imposed law frees the subject to fight against external constraints, whether with violence or not. But wherever one comes down on the question of violence in politics, no one who values freedom can avoid the violence of the rupture.

Chapter Six

Singularity

From the 1960s to the 1980s, the idea of singularity had a leading role in French philosophy. In response to the totalizing aspirations of existentialism, structuralism, and Marxism, a series of thinkers began to rethink political contestation in terms of affirming singularity against the ruling structure rather than revolutionizing the structure. For these thinkers, singularity was not individuality but much more difficult to nail down because it was irreducible to any systematic attempt to comprehend it. In fact, this irreducibility is what defines singularity. It is distinct from everything else and attests to a break in relationality. The student revolts of May 1968 in France owed a debt to the attempt to think the singular and also increased its prominence. These revolts were not so much an attempt to forge a new order in French society but more an effort to challenge order as such. The interventions were local rather than global, a force emanating from the bottom rather than one directed from the top. May 1968 aimed to give singularity an expression that the whole of French society would not and could not swallow.

The resistance to the revolts by the power brokers of the Left testifies to its emphasis on the singular. May 1968 was not a political intervention in the traditional sense, and it even had the effect of aligning, for a time, conservative government forces and the Parti Communiste Français. As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari put it in *A Thousand Plateaus,* "May 1968 in France was molecular, making what led up to it all the more imperceptible from the viewpoint of macropolitics."[1] The molecular, for Deleuze and Guattari, is the level of singularity, and it is on this level that the events of May 1968 played out. Traditional Leftist leaders couldn't understand it, nor could traditional analyses properly account for it. If May 1968 did not change the larger political scene, its effect on the importance of singularity and on the subject's sense of its own singularity was pronounced. It marks the moment at which singularity becomes a

fully articulated social value and replaces social authority as the basis for the subject's worth.[2]

Perhaps the chief spokesperson for singularity during this epoch and after was Michel Foucault. But Foucault was such an exponent of singularity that he would vehemently refuse the title of spokesperson. He envisions himself not as a universal philosopher who stakes out a position on every issue but as an archaeologist or genealogist of thought who makes strategic local interventions. In contrast with someone like Jean-Paul Sartre who takes a public position on every controversial issue of the day, Foucault refuses the position of the philosophical prophet, speaking from the standpoint of universality. This refusal bespeaks his commitment to the primacy of the singular in relation to the universal.

Foucault's philosophical method also hews rigorously to the authority he grants to the local or the singular. In his version of the Cartesian discourse on method, he distinguishes his method—what he calls archaeology and genealogy—from any identifiable operation of knowledge that would arrive at mastery over its objects. He explains,

> Compared to the attempt to inscribe knowledges in the power-hierarchy typical of science, genealogy is, then, a sort of attempt to desubjugate historical knowledges, to set them free, or in other words to enable them to oppose and struggle against the coercion of a unitary, formal, and scientific theoretical discourse. The project of these disorderly and tattered genealogies is to reactivate local knowledges—Deleuze would no doubt call them "minor"—against the scientific hierarchicalization of knowledge and its intrinsic power-effects. To put it in a nutshell: Archaeology is the method specific to the analysis of local discursivities, and genealogy is the tactic which, once it has described these local discursivities, brings into play the desubjugated knowledges that have been released from them. That just about sums up the overall project.[3]

By approaching discourses through an archaeological and then a genealogical method, Foucault works to sustain rather than reduce their diversity. If similarities emerge, these are similarities that inhere in the discourses themselves; they are not the product of the theorist's drive to unity. If it comes at all, universality comes on the heels of singularity, not as its theoretical foundation.

The exploration of local knowledges is not an implicit denial that the universal exists.[4] It is instead an attempt to circumvent the universal and reveal the holes in its dominance. For Foucault, universality is not ubiquitous, and by working on the local or micro level, one can see its limitations. Philosophers who take up the standpoint of the universal are as much to blame as figures of political or social authority for perpetuating its dominance. The task of the thinker, as Foucault sees it, is to intervene on the side of the singular in order to reveal the challenge that it poses to the dominant universality. This is a task that most philosophers have abjured.

Philosophy's historical pursuit of truth represents a failure to recognize the imbrication of truth with power. Nietzsche was the first philosopher to begin to dismantle truth's subjection of the singular, and Foucault sees himself as continuing Nietzsche's campaign against the power of truth. This campaign undermines philosophy's pursuit of truth by exposing how reason constructs madness, how law constructs the criminal, and so on. Foucault brings out the singularity effaced by philosophy and science's imposition of its truth.

The key for Foucault—and for Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida, among others—lies in avoiding a theoretical center through which all other outlying discourses acquire their ultimate significance.[5] That is the paradigm of epistemic violence and philosophic imperialism. The exemplary figure of this type of theorizing is, of course, Hegel, for whom absolute knowledge, according to this reading, masters all recalcitrant phenomena by finding a place for them within the system. Foucault constructs no such system and vows, as a result, to leave the phenomena in their places.

Whereas Hegel constantly does a wanton violence to place with his universalism, Foucault guards the integrity of place. His analysis remains local and doesn't leap over the specificity of a locality. He points out, "What this essentially local character of criticism indicates in reality is an autonomous, non-centralised kind of theoretical production, one that is to say whose validity is not dependent on the approval of the established regimes of thought."[6] By situating and sustaining his analyses at the local level, Foucault believes that he can notice—in a way that systematic thinkers cannot—the slight aberrations and brief moments of resistance that occur there. Foucault is able to notice the presence of counterconduct within the production of proper conduct. When one examines the structure from the perspective of the universal, it seems impervious to insurrection, but on the local level insurrections are occurring all the time. It falls to the critic to notice them.

Foucault sees himself as a thinker of rupture.[7] He believes that returning to the historical content and context themselves without the universal enables him to grasp the rupture that the universal obscures. Even when it claims to account for ruptures, universal history necessarily places them

within a continuum, which is why the archaeologist or genealogist must focus on local knowledges. Foucault uses a form of the term "rupture" in this regard after his panegyric to local criticism. He says, "Only the historical contents allow us to rediscover the ruptural effects of conflict and struggle that the order imposed by functionalist or systematising thought is designed to mask."[8] Within the system of a Hegel or a Marx or a Sartre, the ruptures disappear within the dictates of the structure. One must thus think against the structure, and this thinking must occur from the perspective of the singular.[9]

For Foucault and the other philosophical partisans of May 1968, the affirmation of singularity comes at the expense of universality. They see the universalism of Hegel, Marx, or Sartre as the mark of an imperialism in thought every bit as pernicious as France's colonial war in Algeria. Gilles Deleuze even goes so far as to espouse a transcendental empiricism in order to counter the tyranny of the universal. Deleuze insists that one must be an empiricist because there is nothing but the singular.[10] But the great irony of this struggle to preserve singularity is that it ends up destroying singularity in the pervasive web of context. For the advocates of singularity, universality always runs aground on the specificity of context, but context, in contrast to universality, always effaces the singular. Though Foucault saw himself as a champion of the singular, the effect of the historicism that his work spawned has been the widespread destruction of singularity as such.

One of the amazing effects of reading an analysis by Michel Foucault is the awareness one arrives at that nothing escapes its context. The development of psychoanalysis, for instance, is not a rupture with the accepted truths of psychiatric medicine at the time but part of a modern shift in the structure of power, in which power produces sexuality rather than prohibiting it. What appears as a revolutionary break that outstrips its historical antecedents becomes a symptom of a wide-ranging historical shift. Though history is discontinuous for Foucault, he locates the discontinuity in a contextual change. The Renaissance is different from the eighteenth century because the context has changed: a different episteme began to function and dictate the production of knowledge.

In Foucault's conception, every law is the product of the situation that produces it, not an attempt to alter or transcend that situation.[11] Place explains the genesis of all phenomena encountered. Even the "ruptural effects of conflict and struggle" that escape the purview of the totalizing thinker remain ruptures within the specificity of their contexts. Contextual difference produces the discontinuity that Foucault analyzes, but there is no discontinuity between the context and its product. To accept this latter type of discontinuity—what we have been calling rupture—would mean accepting transcendence and would force Foucault to leave the local level on which he prefers to dwell.[12]

By renouncing the centered theory that would rip the singular phenomenon out of its context in order to grasp its significance, Foucault simultaneously renounces the rupture that causes singularity to emerge. Unless one proceeds from the presupposition of ontological singularity, it is impossible to theorize singularity without the possibility of a rupture from place, without some idea of universality or transcendence. Foucault assumes the existence of singularities that he never deduces, and this assumption colors all his thought. He clearly invests himself in the idea that rupture exists on its own, that singularity is itself a rupture from the total structure, but he doesn't see the dependence of the singularity on the universality at the center of the structure.

It is important to distinguish here between particularity and singularity. Though Foucault views himself as the defender of singularity, he actually remains at the level of the particular. Particularities are given in the historical situation. They are what Alain Badiou would call the multiples of being—the indifferent differences that make up our lifeworld. When we champion the particular and insist on its philosophical priority, we succumb to the exigencies of our situation. Particularities lack any real distinctiveness because their place thoroughly determines their form. Singularity, in contrast, emerges with the universalizing rupture from place. The universalizing rupture is not the context for the various particularities. It is instead the break from context that renders singularities irreducible to their place. Singularity derives from the violence of the rupture that signification brings. When a being enters into language, its particular qualities cease to be important, and a singularity comes to define it. This singularity is what Jacques Lacan calls the *objet petit a,* what is in the subject more than the subject. It can manifest itself in a distinctive trait or a seemingly insignificant idiosyncrasy. But singularity is most visible at the level of the signifier itself. By holding fast to the particular, Foucault misses the fact of the singular, a fact inhering in every proper name.

The Necessity of Naming

As soon as signification emerged, the singularity of the subject began as well. This singularity manifests itself most prominently in the name, which proclaims that the individual bearing it is not simply the member of a species but has a value that stands apart. This is why, when individu-

als living in proximity to one another share a legal name, some effort is usually made to create an unofficial nominal distinction between them. The nickname is an attempt to preserve the singularity involved in the act of naming. The name does not describe the individual subject but points this subject out and marks its singularity as a subject. To reduce the name to a description, as Bertrand Russell does, would be to interpret the singularity of the subject as a particular position within the signifying structure.[13] If the name were a description, the subject would be nothing but its place, whereas the subject is the nothing that exceeds its place. According to the descriptive theory of names, the subject would fit within the signifying structure rather than sticking out as an excessive and alien element.

According to Russell, we can always replace the proper name with a description if the one using it is using the proper name in the accepted way. In *Problems of Philosophy,* he claims, "The thought in the mind of a person using a proper name correctly can generally only be expressed explicitly if we replace the proper name by a description."[14] From this perspective, the perfect description of the qualities of a person would equal the information communicated by the name. One is American, woodworker, gay, Catholic, Republican, parent, cinephile, and sports fan—and these descriptions, when there are enough of them, can replace the name. Rather than being a special signifier, the name, in this view, is just a particular kind of description. Russell's descriptive theory of the name takes away from the subject its isolation and its singularity. Russell's subject fits among its objects, but the cost of this dwelling is what distinguishes the subject.

Russell's reduction of the name to the description of a particular implicitly attests to the absence of singularity in his particulars. Our ability to employ a description in the place of a name indicates that the descriptive words that we use for the rest of the world can account for the subject as well. The purely descriptive name signals the absence of any rupture between the subject and its world. Russell's subject fundamentally belongs to its world, but this means that Russell can't account for the fact that the subject speaks about the world in which it exists. In the act of speaking about the world, we represent it and distance ourselves from it. For Russell, in contrast, speaking must remain wholly immanent in the world that it represents, but this takes away from speech its salient characteristic—its capacity to divorce ideas from the context in which they originate. Russell himself assumes that we can understand what Plato meant by *eidos* even though we have little in common with the Greek world in which he formed this idea. In this sense, he contradicts his own theory at the moment when he comments on Plato's thought. In the act of speaking and using language, we show our failure to belong to our context, even when we attempt to adhere to it with the utmost fidelity.

The relationship between the name and the subject's break from its context becomes clear in Saul Kripke's theory of rigid designation, which provides a philosophical counterpoint to Russell's descriptivism. Kripke's basic claim is that "*names* are rigid designators."[15] Rather than describing someone or something, the name provides an identification that applies regardless of the context in which the person or thing exists. To prove this, Kripke argues that names designate a singularity that remains the same in all possible worlds—either real or imaginary. The proper name's reference—the singularity of the subject—remains the same no matter how much the context changes. As Kripke sees it, the name designates something impervious to contextualization. It is singular rather than particular.

The name does not identify a singularity that already exists and awaits its mark. The act of naming itself constitutes the rupture that divides the singularity of the subject from its particular position within its social world. It is not surprising, then, that Kripke has recourse to religious language to describe this formation of the subject's singularity through the proper name. He contends that "an initial 'baptism' takes place."[16] Of course, one can imagine singular subjects without a name, but one cannot imagine them without the signifier. Through the process of entering into signification, the subject gains a singularity that it did not have before, and the act of naming provides a representation of this process, just as baptism represents the entrance of the individual into the Christian world.[17]

The rigid designation of the name reveals how the subject sustains its singularity across all contexts, but it also indicates the inescapability of this singularity. Subjectivity is not infinitely malleable but retains a singularity throughout all transformations. This is why Foucault and Deleuze reject the concept of the subject so vehemently: it doesn't allow us to imagine a being completely given over to its becoming. To put it in Deleuze's terms, when we retain the subject, there is always some reterritorialization—and the subject itself is the source of that reterritorialization. The subject is what Deleuze and Guattari might call the little fascist that can't abandon the singularity that constitutes it.[18]

In one sense, this critique of the subject has great persuasive power. As much as the subject's singularity frees it from whatever situation it occupies, this singularity also defines the subject in a way that it would undoubtedly like to escape. No one accedes happily to her or his singularity.[19] The aim of psychoanalysis is to lead subjects to the point where they can do so, where they can say, "I am that"—I am the singularity that defines my existence. The difficulty—or even impossibility—of this

step stems from the horror attached to an inescapable singularity. It implies a profound isolation and responsibility. The subject is responsible for its singularity not because it chose this way of being in some atemporal world prior to birth but because it affirms its singularity through the entirety of its existence.

Singularity is the subject's freedom, but it is also the subject's tomb. At birth and death, through the act of naming and the act of marking the tombstone, we proclaim the singularity of the subject through the name. Even though these are social activities, what they involve refuses all assimilation into the social order. Naming and engraving the tombstone stand on the edge of society. No matter how strenuously a society tries to integrate burial rites into its functioning, the tomb always points to the singularity that no social consolation can abridge. The subject is not a social being but the singularity on which all sociability stumbles.

This singularity of the subject that the name represents cannot serve as the foundation for the construction of a self. It resists assimilation in the self as much as it resists assimilation in the community. In *Architecture as Metaphor,* Marxist theorist Kojin Karatani explains what's at stake in the singularity that the proper name proclaims:

> The singularity of an individual is manifest in a proper name because a singularity—as distinct from a particularity—cannot be reduced to a bundle of sets, to any generality. Singularity, contrary to the nuances it may convey, has nothing to do with bourgeois individualism; paradoxically enough, singularity is inseparable from society, from being "in between" communities—it is the space where Descartes initiated his method of radical doubt, a space that was eventually absorbed and enclosed within the paradigm of community.[20]

Here, Karatani connects the rupture that creates the subject's singularity with the rupture of Cartesian doubt. Descartes's discovery of the equality of subjects in their capacity to doubt and the singularity of the subject marked by the proper name both reveal the fecundity of rupture. The doubting subject anticipates the singular subject, even if Descartes couldn't yet recognize it.

Existence Outside the System

The recognition of singularity as a fundamental value actually came very late. Though Christianity affirms the worth of the individual in relation to the collective—Christ advocates leaving ninety-nine sheep to save a single one—it did not yet grasp the singularity of the individual. Unlike Christian solidarity, the early Christian idea of singularity had no relation to rupture. The individual's singularity came directly from God's creation of humanity. As Augustine affirms in *City of God,* human creation is distinct from animal creation because of the singularity with which God imbues humans.[21] Subjects are singular, for early Christianity, only insofar as they fit within the world of creation, not insofar as they fail to do so.

The modern subject, on the contrary, is alienated in a way that the early Christian subject is not. This is why, in his book on Hegel, Georg Lukács identifies the singularity of the subject with the onset of modernity. He asserts, "Individuality or, more precisely, the absolute value of personality in its singularity, is the novel principle that divides the ancient and the modern worlds."[22] It is the case that Descartes takes the subject, rather than God or the order of being itself, as his philosophical starting point. But Descartes never advances a claim about the subject's absolute singularity. In fact, his insistence on the equality of subjects seems to come at the expense of an acknowledgment of their singularity.

This inability to avow singularity persists after Descartes, through Spinoza and Liebniz, despite the role the monad has in the thought of the latter. Though monads lack windows that would connect them to other monads, they share a fundamental structure with others. Prior to the nineteenth century, the singularity of the subject had to give way before the needs of the collective. Even Hegel, whose philosophy reveals that some singularity always escapes every system of thought, celebrates war for correcting the individual's tendency toward narcissistic self-overvaluation. War is valuable because it teaches individuals their unimportance in relation to the state.[23] Hegel cannot admit to himself that the singularity of the subject has a value in and of itself, even though this is precisely what his philosophy tells him. It would fall to Søren Kierkegaard, in the guise of a critique of Hegel, to identify singularity as a value. It becomes, for him, the highest value and the goal of creation.

Following Augustine, Kierkegaard contrasts humanity from all other animals through the relation that develops between the individual and the species. While all other animals value the species above the individual, humanity reverses this valuation. The subject's singularity gives it a value above that of the species. As Kierkegaard puts it in *The Sickness unto Death,* "Man is distinguished from other animal species not only by the superiorities that are generally mentioned but is also qualitatively distinguished by the fact that the individual, the single individual, is more than the species."[24] The human species is just an effect of nature; it has

no value. But the singular subject is the product of a rupture that creates its value. In contrast to Augustine and early Christianity, Kierkegaard does not associate the subject's singularity with its creation by God but with the decision that sets it apart from all creation. This transformation of Christianity is the key to Kierkegaard's recognition of authentic singularity.

Kierkegaard arrives at this position through his reading of Hegel. As Kierkegaard has it, Hegel constructs a system of pure universality in which the singularity of the subject has no place. This is most pronounced in *The Philosophy of History,* where Hegel praises the Idea for its cunning in using individuals to advance itself. He infamously proclaims, "The particular is for the most part of too trifling value as compared with the general: individuals are sacrificed and abandoned. The Idea pays the penalty of determinate existence and of corruptibility, not of itself, but from the passions of individuals."[25] Hegel has a place for individual subjects in his history of the world, but they seem to be confined to their place, while the Idea is able to achieve transcendence. Despite this self-evident denigration of singularity, Hegel's description of how history functions does not match his acknowledgment of the subject's singularity elsewhere.[26]

Hegel conceives of subjectivity as a gesture of negation, a negation in which the subject finds its singularity through the encounter with death. In order to constitute itself, Hegel's subject must immerse itself in absolute negativity and submit to its own singular oblivion. He claims, "The life of the Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins to its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself."[27] The point here is not that the subject triumphs over devastation by enduring it but that the subject always remains within this devastation. All the subject's insight into the world derives from its fundamental negativity, its inability to occupy any place fully. But Kierkegaard reads Hegel's immersion in negativity as but a stepping-stone on the path to affirmation. He sees Hegel as a thinker of affirmation and objectivity, not negation and subjectivity.

On the one hand, Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel pushes him further in the direction of the rupture that forges the subject's singularity, but on the other hand, it causes him to retreat from the rupture with immediacy, a rupture that animates all of Hegel's thought. The great error of Kierkegaard is his adherence to immediacy, his belief that immediacy precedes all mediation, and this is an error that Hegel thoroughly avoids. The belief in immediacy—in a direct experience of things outside the mediation of language—is the most fundamental way of denying the signifying rupture. For Kierkegaard, there is no rupture between a subject and its

experience; the subject is this experience. Hegel, in contrast, shows how mediation shapes every experience from the beginning. Immediacy is not the basis for singularity.

If the subject's experience had an initial immediacy, this would not, contra Kierkegaard, testify to its singularity but to the fact that it would belong to its context. The immediate does not yet stick out from its place; it resides wholly where it is. Even as it introduces sameness into the world, mediation also interrupts the dominance of the place and creates subjects who don't belong. Rather than assail mediation, Kierkegaard should be celebrating it.

But while he displays an understanding of rupture belied by his investment in the immediate, Kierkegaard goes beyond Hegel in his insistence on the subject's singularity. The most important thing in the universe, for Kierkegaard, is not the destiny of the planet or even the result of worldwide political struggles. It is the individual subject's decision that provides a fundamental direction for its existence. This decision ruptures the subject from the rest of the world and isolates it in an irreducible singularity. The decision, according to Kierkegaard, involves the leap of faith to accept Christ or not, but this is immaterial from the perspective of the theory of rupture. Through the decision itself, the subject shows that it no longer belongs.

The problem with Hegel's philosophy of world history, for Kierkegaard, stems from its inability to account for the singularity that doesn't fit within history. Hegel's philosophy suggests an attitude in which the importance of singularity lies in its service to the whole. Kierkegaard advises a complete change of perspective. He claims, "World-historically, the individual subject certainly is a trifle, but the world-historical is, after all, an addendum; ethically, the individual subject is infinitely important."[28] The infinite importance of the individual subject derives from the singularity it acquires through its rupture from the finite situation. If we were all simply finite and natural beings, Hegel's philosophy of history would be correct. But the subject doesn't fit within its world.

Singularity depends on sustaining the rupture from the world, and forces from the world constantly push us to abandon the rupture and accommodate ourselves to it. There is a recurrent temptation to abandon one's singularity because it constitutes an offense to others. Lisbeth Salander's singularity in Stieg Larsson's trilogy of novels focusing on her (*The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo, The Girl Who Played with Fire,* and *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest*) reveals the inherent offensiveness of singularity as such. Salander has a large dragon tattoo on her back and dresses in a punk style, with multiple piercings, black leather clothes,

dark makeup, and spiked hair. But her singularity appears primarily in her refusal to participate in the social niceties that others rely on as a second nature. This refusal reveals that she doesn't fit comfortably within society—nor within an outsider society of punks, since the novels don't depict any such subgroup that would accept her. Larsson's novels make evident how Salander disturbs those who abandon their singularity for the sake of belonging. This disturbance is, however, precisely what allows readers to enjoy her even as she remains a site of trauma.

The insistence on one's singularity tacitly condemns the situation in which one exists and all those who adhere to the norms of the situation. This is why singularity always encounters hostility. To embrace one's singularity as a subject is not to parade one's nonconformity but to experience one's profound homelessness. The singular being has no place except the place it has left in order to constitute its singularity. No matter how diligently it follows the dictates of the situation, it will never find itself at home there, and it is this alienation, according to Kierkegaard, that guards the subject's singularity from falling into particularity.

Kierkegaard makes the same distinction between particularity and singularity that Karatani does in the passage cited above. The particular, for Kierkegaard, is constantly changing. It is reducible to the context in which it appears. To put it in his terms, sin is particular, while faith is singular. To avow one's singularity is to access the infinite, in contrast to the finitude of all our particular actions. He claims, "Most men . . . play along in life, so to speak, but they never experience putting everything together on one thing, never achieve the idea of an infinite self-consistency. That is why they are always talking among themselves about the particular, particular good deeds, particular sins."[29] Most of what we believe constitutes the substance of our existence is simply the product of our situation. We remain mired in the particulars of this situation, which is why Kierkegaard laments the inability of most subjects to affirm their singularity. They prefer the constant change of the particular and the secure background of the situation, against which all these particular acts take place. In contrast to the singular, the particular hews strictly to the finite world, which is why the particular does not involve a rupture in the way that singularity does.

God plays a key part in Kierkegaard's philosophy because the concept permits him to grant a position to the infinite. Without God, as Kierkegaard views it, we would be condemned to the dreariness of our finitude and would be incapable of any rupture from it. He cannot accede to the Hegelian infinity of self-limitation or the mathematical infinity of Leibniz, and he would have had no chance to be acquainted with the infinite set of Georg Cantor. In Kierkegaard's philosophy, God stands in for the infinite, but it is not an infinite, like the God of the Middle Ages, that remains

outside the finite. Kierkegaard's God is the infinity that exists among the finite, every bit as much as Hegel's.

The infinity of God allows the subject to break from its finitude. In Kierkegaard's thought, God does not create the subject as a singular being. Instead, God or infinity names the rupture in which the subject finds the singularity that is impossible within the finite situation. To make Kierkegaard's leap of faith toward God is to break from the confines of what is possible and to accomplish the impossible. The rupture of the infinite is a difficult one, but it is the only path to singularity. In the *Concept of Anxiety,* Kierkegaard notes, "Whoever does not wish to sink into the wretchedness of the finite is constrained in the most profound sense to struggle with the infinite."[30] The singular subject never achieves infinitude, but it also does not give up this "struggle with the infinite." This struggle tears the subject out of its finite situation and affirms the subject's infinite value.

As Kierkegaard sees it, the struggle with the infinite is first and foremost a negative struggle. One abandons or counts as worthless the consolations that the world offers. Kierkegaard personally, for instance, gives up his beloved fiancée Regine Olsen for the sake of his theological work. He sees that his singularity depends on sustaining the torture of faith and doubt—equivalent terms for him—rather than finding romantic bliss in the world, no matter how appealing that bliss might be. Of course, one can imagine a married philosopher continuing to struggle with the infinite, but the point is that this struggle requires some negation of the finite world and its appeal.

Even though it directly concerns only one isolated being, the singularity of the subject and its affirmation change existence for everyone. Singularity demands a different mode of relating, a refusal to reduce the subject to its particular being. When Kierkegaard discovers singularity, he discovers it through a critique of Hegel. This critique, however, only unearths what is already inherent in Hegel's thought. Despite being known as the thinker of the universal, Hegel grasps the emergence of the subject's singularity even before Kierkegaard. But it is Kierkegaard who makes this singularity the center of his philosophy in a way that Hegel could not. This gesture paves the way for the numerous affirmations of singularity in the twentieth century.

Cinematic Punctuation

The primary contention of Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" is that the act of mechanical reproduction eliminates singularity. He claims that "in even the most perfect reproduc-

tion, *one* thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of art—its unique existence in a particular place."[31] The "unique existence" of the work of art produces an aura that does not survive the process of reproduction. In the place of a unique singularity, mechanical reproduction creates a sameness in which nothing stands out. As Benjamin explains later in the essay, "The stripping of the veil from the object, the destruction of the aura, is the signature of a perception . . . that, by means of reproduction, it extracts sameness even from what is unique."[32] Mechanical reproduction seems opposed to singularity because the act of mechanical reproduction subjects all reproduced objects to the same process. All objects become images that exist on the same ontological plane.

The elimination of the subject's singularity in the cinema is homologous to the elimination of the object's. As a cinematic spectator, one watches a flow of images in which nothing stands out, and the homogeneity of these images aims at producing homogeneous spectators. Films work to create similar responses among different spectators. The absence of any singularity in the cinematic object makes it impossible for singularity to emerge in the spectator, because nothing on the screen arouses or engages the subject in its isolation. Though there are obviously particular differences among spectators (as reception studies continually bear out), there can be no singular engagement with the film as long as it presents objects without any singularity. Singularity in the spectator requires it in the cinematic object—otherwise the cinema is just a mass experience like the military parade or the public execution, in which there is no room for the psychic experience of singularity.

The reduction at work in the cinematic image becomes especially apparent in the age of digital video. Whereas an analogue recording preserves the image of what one has filmed, the digital recording translates the filmed objects into a code from which it can produce images. Any singularity existing in the filmed objects disappears into the form of the digital code. The key to singularity in the cinema cannot lie in the objects that film captures but must reside in how film deploys this content.[33] If it exists at all, irreducible singularity in the cinema is clearly formal.

The cinematic capacity for producing singularity derives from the cinematic capacity for moments of rupture, and the most prominent manifestation of rupture is the cut. Through cuts, a film breaks up the continuity of representation and reveals that the regime of representation is not whole. The cut is the product of the director's or editor's act, and this manifestation of subjectivity divides the represented object world. Through this break in the object world, the cut establishes a way of differentiating objects and affirming their singularity. Through the deployment of cuts,

a filmmaker can highlight the value of an object or a subject that would otherwise be part of a mass. The cut functions as a punctuation mark in the cinema, and it is this punctuation that enables singularity to emerge.[34]

The birth of continuity editing early in Hollywood attests paradoxically to the rupturing power of the cut and its radicality. Continuity editing—the use of shot/reverse shot, the 180-degree rule, cutting on action, and so on—exists in order to contain and minimize this radicality. When we watch a film that employs continuity editing, we tend not to notice the cuts, or if we do, they seem like natural breaks rather than ruptures in the fabric of the filmic world. Continuity editing is a thoroughly ideological phenomenon, but its early appearance in the history of cinema—one could conservatively say that it began to form within fifteen years of the invention of cinema—reveals the danger that the rupture of the cut poses. This danger becomes evident in the conflict montage of Sergei Eisenstein.

Eisenstein, whose principle of montage emphasizes rapid cutting between disparate material, is one of the great filmmakers of the sharp cut. But he appears to be a filmmaker of the universal rather than the singular. His montage seems to work toward submitting singularity to the universal laws of the dialectical process. Montage aims not at providing spectators with the experience of singularity but at prompting them to think about the dialectical links between what appear as singularities. The false immediacy of the isolated object must give way to the thought of this object's mediation in the totality of the process. Rather than obeying the exigencies of the object itself, montage heeds the dialectical form of thought and imposes this form on objects.[35] As Eisenstein puts it in *Film Form,* "The montage form, as structure, is a reconstruction of the laws of the thought process."[36] Eisenstein turns to montage out of his interest in making films that would instruct rather than merely entertain, and the nature of this instruction would focus on helping spectators to see the mediated universal where they otherwise notice only isolated particularities.

Despite this political commitment to instruction and despite aligning montage with "the laws of the thought process," Eisenstein nonetheless finds a place within the montage structure for a singularity that cannot be reduced to this process. This is because montage privileges the disjunctive cut, and the disjunctive cut has the capacity to isolate singularity even as it forms a link between distinct objects. By creating a break within the scene and thereby punctuating it, the cut enables the spectator to see a singularity isolated from the continuous flow of images. Eisenstein undoubtedly wants the singularities produced by the film form to lead the spectator toward a political lesson, but he also aims at affirming singularity for its own sake. In fact, this insistence on singularity within the depiction of

collectivity is a central part of Eisenstein's cinematic philosophy and his critique of other Marxist filmmakers. He notes, "Collectivism means the maximum development of the individual within the collective, a conception irreconcilably opposed to bourgeois individualism. Our first mass films missed this deeper meaning."[37] Rather than destroying singularity, collectivism, as Eisenstein sees it, allows for its full development, and the aesthetic that he works out in his films manifests this idea.

Whereas Stalin appreciated Eisenstein's representation of Ivan in *Ivan the Terrible, Part One* (1944) and identified wholeheartedly with the film's hero, he balked at the sequel. One might contend that Eisenstein's insistence on depicting the singularity of Ivan in *Ivan the Terrible, Part Two* (1958) ended his career as a filmmaker. The result was that Stalin immediately halted production of *Ivan the Terrible, Part Three,* destroyed the footage that had been shot, and refused to allow *Part Two* to be released. The singularity of Ivan aroused Stalin's extreme displeasure when he saw himself in it. Here, the cinema's capacity for depicting a singular object engages the singularity of the spectator in an almost programmatic fashion.

In the celebrated Odessa Steps sequence from *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), Eisenstein uses a series of cuts to isolate and emphasize the singularity of several individuals from Odessa who are being attacked as a mass by the Cossacks. Whereas the Cossacks are always only a collective body representing an idea, the people of Odessa attain singularity in this scene. Eisenstein refuses to singularize the Cossacks in order to depict how the adherence to the dictates of their situation (and, more specifically, to the commands that they have been given) produces bland uniformity both in the subject and in the objects that the subject sees. The Cossacks lack any singularity themselves, and this lack of singularity makes it impossible for them to see the singularity of the people they kill. There is no singularity in the Cossack world, except insofar as it must be eradicated.

As Eisenstein depicts them, the Cossacks identify themselves with the smooth functioning of order and refuse to tolerate any gaps or disturbances within that order. This is the attitude of what Jacques Rancière calls the police. According to Rancière, "Its slogan is: 'Move along! There's nothing to see here!' The police is that which says that here, on this street, there's nothing to see and so nothing to do but move along. It asserts that the space for circulating is nothing but the space of circulation."[38] Despite their numbers, the Cossacks are a unified character because they embody the policing position that disdains any interruption of work—like what occurs when the people of Odessa demonstrate in support of the rebellious sailors. Once a subject commits to the police ideal, its singularity and its capacity for seeing singularity in others vanishes. But the point of the Odessa Steps sequence is not so much the revelation of the Cossacks as figures of the police; they are not Eisenstein's principal concern here.

The Odessa Steps sequence depicts the cost that the people of Odessa pay for the Cossacks' inability to see their singularity, but it also depicts their singularity. Here, Eisenstein does not so much create class sympathy or a sense of collectivism among the spectators as an identification with various singularities. Though we see large groups of people running away from the attacking Cossacks, the film constantly takes pains to singularize the recipients of the violence, and it does this through the rupture of the montage cut. The cuts do not simply turn the film's focus briefly to isolated individuals but attempt to capture what defines them as individuals.

Rather than offering a change of perspective on the massacre, the cuts that Eisenstein introduces reorient the spectator in the space of the scene and demand a new way of looking. Most cuts in the cinema minimize this demand for a reorientation of the spectator's look, but the possibility for a rupture with one's ingrained way of looking nonetheless inheres in every cut. The cinematic cut, especially as Eisenstein employs it, reveals how rupture can play itself out on an everyday level.

The victims of the Cossacks are not individuals or a group but singularities. What the Cossacks attempt to destroy on the steps is not the individual but the form of singularity that would interrupt their police authority. Eisenstein shows this through the specific way that he films the victims. For instance, the cuts from the general assault to shots focusing on a young mother pushing her baby in a stroller separate this woman from the crowd. Eisenstein shows her being hit by a bullet, and then depicts her struggle to save her child as she collapses to the ground. Each cut to a shot of her indicates Eisenstein's decision to pay attention to her struggle and death to the exclusion of what is happening around her. When she is initially hit, we see a close-up of the agony on her face, a shot of the baby carriage teetering on the step, another close-up of her face, and finally a close-up of her bleeding stomach.

Eisenstein isolates here the singularity of this anonymous woman's suffering. As the film shows, she suffers for both herself and her child. When she dies, we see her collapse out of the frame, and her disappearance leaves the crying baby alone in the carriage. Her fall eventually sends the carriage down the steps—a shot that captures a moment of complete loss, the woman's death and her failure to protect her infant. Though she remains nameless, she is as singular as any character in the cinema, and the disjunctive cuts of Eisenstein's conflict montage produce this singularity.

As the baby carriage rolls down the steps, Eisenstein cuts to another victim of the Cossacks, an older woman who reacts with horror to the

tumbling baby. The close-ups of this woman emphasize her glasses, which are slightly crooked and distinguish her face. When the carriage finally crashes, Eisenstein concludes the montage with a cut from the final Cossack onslaught to an image of this woman with a bullet through the right lens of her glasses (which is perhaps the most famous image in all of Eisenstein's films). In showing the Cossack bullet killing this woman by shattering her glasses, Eisenstein doesn't simply depict their wanton violence but isolates the specific target of this violence—the singularity of the subject. Earlier shots identified these glasses as the point of the woman's singularity, and the final shot shows this singularity being destroyed. The cut to this final image highlights the point of opposition to the Cossacks and what they are working to destroy.

The singularity that Eisenstein accentuates in *Battleship Potemkin* works in juxtaposition with the idea of collectivism that underlies the entire film. This double structure allows Eisenstein to make clear that communism (or any form of collectivism) does not imply the elimination of singularity but, properly conceived, leads to its propagation. Not only does he use the rupture of the cut to isolate singularity but he also uses the close-up to highlight it in contrast to the long shots that serialize the Cossacks. The close-up supplements the cut in the filmic depiction of singularity, and it plays this part because of its relation to filmic space.

Gestures Up Close

The cut from a long shot to a close-up enhances the rupture because the close-up does not just show one aspect of the filmic space but has the effect of removing the object from the filmic space altogether. This is what both Béla Balázs and Gilles Deleuze privilege about the close-up. As Balázs puts it, "The close-up not only isolates objects in space, but seems to lift them out of space entirely and transfer them into a conceptual space in which different laws obtain."[39] Clearly, if the object in a close-up ceased to be a spatial object, spectators would not be able to perceive it. But Balázs makes this comment out of an awareness of the singularity that the close-up produces. The object in the close-up becomes singular to such an extent that it no longer appears to belong to the same form of representation that governs other filmic objects. The object of the close-up is a formal version of the subject's singularity.

There are, of course, other means besides the cut and the close-up by which a film can generate singularity: the tracking shot that captures an individual's characteristic gait, the zoom that isolates another individual's idiosyncratic twitch, or the long take that shows an individual moving

suddenly. What these examples have in common is the emphasis that they place on the gesture. Gestures are acts of irreducible singularity because they communicate what language cannot. As Giorgio Agamben points out in *Means Without End,* "The gesture is essentially always a gesture of not being able to figure something out in language."[40] The singularity of the subject emerges through the incapacity of language to say everything, and the gesture marks this incapacity.

We turn to gesture at the moment when language becomes mute and we require an additional means of communicating. It is in this sense outside language. But in another sense gesture never leaves the terrain of language: we gesture in order to say something that we might say, however cumbersomely, with language itself. Agamben views gesture as the moment when language ceases to be a means to an end and becomes a pure means. Though a gesture might direct someone to do something, the gesture lacks the representation of the word. The gesture interrupts spoken communication and always indicates more than what it signifies. With gesture, a subject marks its singularity. It is a form of communication that cannot be reduced to the signifier and thus is what Agamben would call communicability itself. Gesture emerges from language but sticks out within language as the point where the singularity of the speaking subject intrudes. The gesture is not a positive characteristic of the subject but the indication of an absence within language that is the subject. It marks what the subject doesn't have and can't attain.

On the one hand, the subject's gesture is merely an ordinary movement that may be used to communicate. Its capacity for indicating the kernel of subjectivity seems dubious. But on the other hand, the excess contained within every gesture is evident. The gesture never simply communicates but communicates in a way specific to the subject. It is both an ordinary object and the subject's singularity.[41] With gesture, the noncoincidence of the object with itself becomes evident. Gesture's skewed relationship to language makes it a privileged site for the expression of the subject's singularity in the form of an ordinary object.

The association between gesture and cinema is, for Agamben, an intimate one. The generality of the filmic image functions as a vehicle for the singularity of the gesture. Or, as Agamben puts it, "cinema leads images back to the homeland of gesture."[42] The cinematic depictions of gesture allow the filmic work of art to use reproduction to illustrate what is irreducible to reproduction. The absolute form of cinematic singularity is the close-up of the gesture. The close-up removes the gesture from spatiality and thereby underlines its singularity.

The irreducible singularity of the close-up of the gesture manifests itself most completely in a scene toward the end of Michael Mann's *Heat*

(1995). Though obviously there have been many memorable gestures in the history of cinema, the gesture that Mann captures toward the end of this film has the virtue of perfectly indicating singularity. *Heat* depicts the conflict between a group of high-level thieves, led by Neal McCauley (Robert DeNiro), and the police chasing them, led by Lt. Vincent Hanna (Al Pacino). Near the end of the film, after the thieves have made a large robbery, they plan to leave the country, but the police set up various traps to stop them before they escape. In one such scenario, they hold the spouse, Charlene (Ashley Judd), of Chris (Val Kilmer), one of the thieves. The police use Charlene to trap Chris and are awaiting his presence at the meeting place in order to arrest or shoot him. As he drives up to the location, the police officers send Charlene to the window of the second-story apartment to confirm Chris's identity.

Mann shows Chris get out of his car and look up at Charlene on the apartment balcony. He smiles as he recognizes her, while a reverse shot close-up of her face doesn't register her feelings. She appears neither pleased nor upset to see him. But then Mann quickly cuts to another close-up of her midsection and hands, which are holding the railing in front of her body. She gestures subtly in front of her body, moving her flat hand from left to right. The signification of this gesture is that she has lured Chris into a trap and that he is not safe here. By keeping her hand in front of her body, she blocks the officers' view of her signal and allows only Chris—and the spectator—to see her indication that he is coming into a police trap. Mann cuts back to Chris as he registers the disappointment of Charlene's betrayal, but he quickly gathers himself and asks someone playing basketball nearby about finding a place to live. Charlene's gesture and Chris's quick recovery save his life, and the police allow him to leave.

Mann shows the gesture with the close-up in order to isolate it from the surrounding environment and even from Charlene herself. The form of the close-up is requisite for depicting the singularity of the gesture. The environment is nothing but the trap that the police have set for Chris. Even the basketball players to whom he speaks are part of this trap, as is Charlene. As an individual, Charlene has betrayed Chris to the police, but the close-up of the gesture, which expresses the singularity of Charlene's subjectivity, is not part of the trap. The close-up shows us that the gesture exists outside the space of the rest of the film, outside the space of the police trap.

Through this gesture, Mann marks the irreducibility of subjectivity itself. The gesture allows Charlene to indicate what she can't say to Chris. If Charlene were to tell Chris openly that she had betrayed him to the police, the police would obviously overhear and thwart Chris's escape. The desperate situation reduces her means of communication to the hidden gesture made in public. But Charlene's gesture indicates what can't be said in an even more fundamental sense. It accomplishes the impossible by telling Chris that she is betraying him in the midst of the betrayal. It is always possible, of course, to confess to a betrayal after the fact, though there is a sense in which the confession, by assuaging the conscience of the confessor, actually extends the betrayal.[43] But to confess to betrayal while continuing to betray someone would violate the principle of noncontradiction. The gesture permits just this impossible act. Charlene's gesture of confessing to the betrayal within the betrayal works because it lacks any positive content. Rather than telling Chris what to do, Charlene simply announces her own status as a betrayer. It is thus a pure enunciation (or a pure means) deprived of any enunciated content. There where Chris sees his beloved object, she indicates that there is nothing but betrayal. At the moment when Charlene reveals her singularity to him, Chris must confront the intractability and the horror of this singularity.

Within the betrayal, the close-up of Charlene's gesture registers the confession of betrayal, which is at the same time the reversal of betrayal. It is always through a similar reversal of betrayal that the subject asserts its singularity. The subject initially emerges through a forced choice: figures of social authority present the individual with a demand for conformity to the social law, and the individual must conform to this demand in order to become a subject. Individuals choose to comply with this demand, but one cannot accede to subjectivity without this compliance. Compliance precedes any assertion of agency on the part of the subject. Subjectivity is the result of a betrayal of oneself in the name of the social law, but the betrayal creates the very subject that one betrays. It is a creative betrayal that results from the initial forced choice.

The police in *Heat* present Charlene with another version of the initial forced choice offered by social authority. She can refuse to betray Chris, but by doing so she'll go to jail and lose her child. Her existence as a subject in some sense depends on agreeing to the betrayal. The police give Charlene a forced choice, and she conforms. But the encounter with Chris at the window allows Charlene to repeat the forced choice and to opt for the impossible. She chooses not to betray him without losing her life, and this is only possible through repetition. If she had chosen not to betray Chris when the police first offered their deal, she would simply have gone to jail and lost her child. But when she chooses not to betray Chris when the situation of the forced choice repeats itself, she can choose what would have initially been impossible. This impossible choice, embodied in the gesture, is the manifestation of the irreducible singularity of the subject, and it is the result of a rupture from the social forced choice.

The irreducible singularity of the subject is most often lost in the process of cinematic representation. Included in a series of images, this singularity appears as part of an indifferent mass. Benjamin is certainly not wrong to see in the act of mechanical reproduction the evisceration of aura, but cinema also has the capacity to produce a form of singularity that evades the aristocracy of aura. It creates singularity without aura. When cinema focuses attention on moments of rupture, as Michael Mann does in *Heat,* the medium has a unique ability to isolate singularity. Moments of singularity constitute the secret of cinematic art.

Much of the appeal of cinema undoubtedly stems from its promise to expose the most intimate secrets and to place the most private scenes in the public domain. In this sense, the cinematic appeal is pornographic. There is nothing so private that one cannot film it and thereby betray its private nature. But there is another appeal to cinema that has nothing to do with exposing what is private. This appeal—which is the appeal inherent in Mann's close-up of Charlene's gesture—is tied not to the revelation of a private moment but to an indication of a rupture within the field of representation. Through the rupturing cut, cinema shows the inherent incompleteness of the object world, and the singularity of the subject resides in the gap in objects.

The subject is not a private being hidden away from the public world of representation. It is instead the gap or rupture within the public world. We find our singularity not by adhering to a public identity through which we gain recognition nor by retreating deeper into our private selves that provide respite from the public world but by occupying the rupture that the gesture makes manifest. Political activity—even mass movements aimed at large-scale social transformation, like communist revolution itself—must take this singularity as its starting point. When it doesn't begin with the singularity of the rupture, the collective political act descends into what it struggles against.

Only the Names Remain

The practical effort to take up singularity as a political task is perhaps the hardest to conceive. Most often, we turn to singularity in order to make an ethical plea that either ignores politics or silently criticizes it.[44] Those who work to preserve the names of all those killed in a particular event do not do so in order to articulate a politics of singularity. Rather, they emphasize remembrance of the singularity that fell victim to politics of whatever stripe. The Vietnam War Memorial in the United States and the Hall of Names in Yad Vashem represent two instances of this tendency. Neither seeks to make a political point about U.S. imperialism or about Nazism as a political project. Instead, these chronicles of the names of those who perished seek to fulfill an ethical duty to their memory by not allowing history to forget them. The singularity of the name and of the subject is typically the vehicle for remembrance rather than rupture. Remembrances of singularity today too often replace politics rather than energizing political acts.

The ethical project of remembrance also seems to be at work in actions of the Madres de Plazo de Mayo (Mothers of the Disappeared) in Argentina. Like a live version of the Vietnam War Memorial, the Madres de Plazo de Mayo emphasized the singularity of their children who disappeared during the so-called Dirty War in Argentina, a time of massive state-sponsored terror against Argentine citizens. The victims often had Leftist leanings, but many victims were children. From the close of the Juan Perón era in the 1970s to the end of Jorge Rafael Videla's dictatorship in 1983, the Dirty War resulted in the disappearance of perhaps thirty thousand people.

In response to the disappearance of their children, a group of mothers formed to demonstrate against the kidnapping of their children. The first demonstration took place on the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires on April 30, 1977. In the beginning, the mothers' intent was to show their concern for their missing children and their determination that, in the face of their abduction by government forces, they would remember them. What began as a small number of mothers coming together to express their outrage grew into a large-scale political movement. But the movement soon took a specific tack for marking the singularity of each disappeared child.

The mothers wore head scarves in order to identify themselves to one another, but these scarves also bore the names of their disappeared children and marked their singularity. In Jo Fisher's collection of testimony entitled *Mothers of the Disappeared,* one of the mothers, Aída de Suárez recounts, "It was very easy to spot the headscarves in the crowds and people came up to us and asked us who we were. We'd managed to attract attention so we decided to use the scarves at other meetings and then every time we went to Plaza de Mayo together. We all made proper white scarves and we embroidered on the names of our children."[45] The use of the name highlights the singularity of the missing child, but the point of this demonstration is not just memorializing—as it is at the U.S. Vietnam War Memorial or at the Hall of Names in Yad Vashem—but rather politicizing the singular.

By confronting Argentine authorities with the names of the disappeared, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo identify singularity with rupture. They make

explicit the violence that the authorities have done to singularity and work to restore it to its privileged position. The scarves name those who don't count anymore in Argentine society, but for these mothers they cannot be replaced. There is no question of simply having additional children to substitute for those who have disappeared. The scarves testify to the irreducibility of the children and to a rupture from Argentine society as such.

The head scarves with their names testify to what is missing in everyday Argentine life. While most people can continue to act as if these missing singularities were unimportant, the Madres interrupt the procession of everyday life with the proclamation of their scarves. By wearing these scarves during a political demonstration, the Madres show that their rupture of everyday life is a condition for their articulation of singularity, and they sustain the association between rupture and singularity. Theirs is not an apolitical remembrance but an attempt to confront a repressive regime with the singularity that it cannot abide.[46]

The political charge of the demonstrations became apparent when the Madres began to focus on political questions beyond the missing children. The singularity of the missing child remained the ground of the political engagement, but the point was not simply to find the children; the political system that produced the disappearances had to change. According to the movement, the political order had to foreground singularity rather than making use of it for domination and profit. By turning from memory to politics, the Madres showed their commitment to the rupture that produced the singularity they were defending.

Instances of the articulation of singularity are relatively easy to find. Individuals and groups highlight the singularity of a subject in a way that interrupts the ordinary. Even the funeral procession does this, as traffic must abandon its usual movement and give right-of-way to the procession. We allow the subject's singularity to manifest itself in death, and we accept this interruption of the functioning of the social system. But what we don't accept—what the Madres de Plaza de Mayo accomplished—is the politicization of this singularity.

In order to respect the singularity of other subjects, it is not enough to pull aside for a funeral procession. One need not go so far as wearing the names of one's own government's illegal detainees on a head scarf (though there is certainly much to recommend a political act like this). But affirming singularity requires constantly wearing a metaphorical head scarf: one must stick out from the everyday routine in order to affirm what it refuses to accommodate. This rupture within the heart of everyday life is the essence of the subject's singularity.

Chapter Seven

The Inhuman

The rupture between the animal and the human appears today as the most difficult version of rupture to defend. More and more, this barrier appears to be no barrier at all—or at least an almost infinitely malleable one. From animal rights activists and biologists to philosophers and sociologists, challenges to the rupture of the human from its animality have become commonplace. Yet the emergence of an absolute human distinctiveness, the emergence of the human itself as a political value, is the linchpin of the theory of rupture. If the human is reducible to its animality, all the other values outlined in the preceding chapters lose their force. Kant's recognition of freedom, to take just one example, cannot apply to beings (namely, animals) that do not represent the law to themselves. But at the same time, the theory of rupture cannot have recourse to a soul to save human distinctiveness. It is instead the inhumanity of the human, the human's failure to be a human animal, that constitutes the source of its rupture from animality.

However, there is no question that human exceptionalism has justified innumerable atrocities. The systematized cruelty of the factory farm and the sadistic brutality of the slaughterhouse owe their continued acceptance to the idea that the suffering of nonhuman animals cannot compare with that of human beings. If the public were to discover human beings enduring such treatment, it would meet with a mass outrage that is almost entirely absent in the case of animals. Exceptionalism—or what animal liberation philosopher Peter Singer calls speciesism—provides the philosophical cover for a system of exploitation that would otherwise be ethically untenable for most. The continued existence of this exploitation presents a powerful argument against the idea of a rupture between the human and other animals. Rather than creating value, the rupture between human and animal appears to be an obstacle to establishing common values across the barrier of species.

Led in part by Singer himself, various movements to combat human exceptionalism and to link humans with other animals have now come to the fore. Throughout the world, there is an increasing sense that the distinction between the human and other animals is quantitative rather than qualitative—or, in other words, that there exists no rupture between the human and the rest of the animal realm. This transformation manifests itself in the meteoric rise of animal studies, which has occurred not where we would expect, in the discipline of biology, but in the humanities. There has also been a proliferation of novels narrated from the perspective of an animal—from Barbara Gowdy's *The White Bone* (2000) and José Eduardo Agualusa's *Book of the Chameleons* (2004) to Joann Sfar's *The Rabbi's Cat* (2007) and Garth Stein's *The Art of Racing in the Rain* (2009). By locating narrative consciousness in the perspective of an animal, these novelists attest to the growing attenuation of what has been, since the dawn of modernity, the inextirpable difference that defines the human. The tie that binds humans and other animals is, according to this way of thinking, stronger than the difference between them.[1]

Perhaps the most pronounced manifestation of the end of human exceptionalism is the explosion of sociobiology and neo-Darwinist explanations of social phenomena. Based in molecular genetics, contemporary sociobiology distinguishes itself from now discredited social Darwinism by simply avoiding taboo questions of racial superiority or inferiority. Of course, the science in each case is different. Herbert Spencer had no idea of DNA or genetic heritage when he made evolutionary concepts the basis for sociological investigation, but the basic impulse is the same. The goal, for Spencer as for Edward O. Wilson and Richard Dawkins, is to biologize politics, to understand the movement of society through the application of the biological sciences.[2] Social phenomena ultimately become biological phenomena.

From this perspective, it is the absence of a rupture between the human and other animals that permits this reduction. From the perspective of sociobiology, all the attempts to save human difference in the face of its clear belonging to the evolutionary chain of species are no more than the last gasps of a dying religiosity. Without the thoroughly specious concept of the soul, one cannot sustain the difference, and our ability to think beyond the idea of a qualitative difference between human and other animals enables us to understand the causes for human actions in a genuine nonidealist fashion for the first time. Biology's triumph today brings with it the promise of an immense explanatory power.

The predominance of the biological or neurological explanation shows itself not simply through the number of books sold by Daniel Dennett

or Steven Pinker but through the currency that this type of explanation has in the public debate. If one peruses the "Ideas" section of the *New York Times* or the *Boston Globe,* one finds a preponderance of biological explanations for social phenomena. Most often, the latest research in brain science reveals, according to translators of expert opinion in these newspapers, new insights into seemingly intractable problems. In one case, we see that the brain is actually a threat to democracy, and in another, we discover that social hierarchies derive from our animal need for order. As one writer puts it, "Human beings are social animals, a fact that is central to how we as a species see the world. And like other social animals, whether wolves or chickens or chimpanzees, we sort ourselves into rankings. These rankings aren't static, they can change over time, but they impose order on social interaction."[3] Social hierarchy is not the result of class struggle (as it would be for Marx) or the will to power (as it would be for Nietzsche) or even an aggressive turn of the death drive (as it would be for Freud), but it stems rather from a simple biological need. The simplicity of this reasoning holds the key to its power, and even though the science backing the claims of Dennett or Pinker is more sophisticated, the argument is not.

But in the end, though the triumph of biology over and within sociology can justify antidemocratic tendencies, the prevailing use of biology today is egalitarian and ethical. By showing the biological kinship between humans and other animals, one destroys not only the justification for cruelty toward animals but also the intrahuman barbarism that shares roots in human exceptionalism.[4] When we view other humans through the lens of a shared animality, we cease to treat them like "animals." In other words, the elimination of the idea of human-animal difference permits us to avoid the ethical catastrophes that this idea has historically underwritten. The tie that binds humans to other animals also binds humans to other humans.

The fundamental tie that binds is the capacity to suffer. The parent figure of the movements to transform our understanding of human-animal difference is Jeremy Bentham, who was the first in the West to link humans to other animals through this capacity.[5] In his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation,* Bentham develops the line of thought that concludes with this position. He claims,

> The day has been, I grieve to say in many places it is not yet past, in which the greater part of the species, under the denomination of slaves, have been treated by the law exactly upon the same footing as, in England for example, the inferior races of animals are still. The day *may* come,

> when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withholden from them but by the hand of tyranny. The French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of a tormentor. It may come one day to be recognized, that the number of the legs, the villosity of the skin, or the termination of the *os sacrum,* are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate. What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or, perhaps, the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day, or a week, or even a month, old. But suppose the case were otherwise, what would it avail? the [*sic*] question is not, Can they *reason*? nor, Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*?[6]

Bentham here explicitly challenges the Cartesian and, *avant la lettre,* the structural justifications for human exceptionalism. Without recourse to the idea of the soul, Bentham's argument comparing the horse or dog with the human infant seems difficult to counter. Awareness of the commonality that derives from suffering changes the approach to the problem of differentiating the human from the animal. The ramifications of this change are just now being fully felt.

Nonetheless, even those thinkers about the animal who are careful to sustain a distinction between the human and the animal typically emphasize some fundamental commonality. Though she doesn't mention Bentham, Cora Diamond locates the commonality in an area adjacent to the capacity to suffer—a shared woundedness. She claims, "The awareness we have of being a living body . . . carries with it exposure to the bodily sense of vulnerability to death, sheer animal vulnerability, the vulnerability we share with them."[7] Vulnerability provides for Diamond a connection that challenges the traditional rigidity of the human-animal divide in Western thought.

The notion that humans, like animals, are primarily vulnerable beings, beings with the capacity to be wounded, shapes not just how we view the relationship between humans and other animals but also how we view that between humans and other humans. If the capacity to suffer defines the human, then the first ethical responsibility is that of combating and intervening to prevent suffering. The emergence of this definition of humanity through vulnerability has accompanied the transformation of politics into ethics. That is to say, turning sociology into biology implicitly turns politics into ethics. We are no longer confronted with political questions like "What is the best form of government?" or "What economic system is the most just?" but ethical ones like "Should we intervene in another country to save lives?" or "How much of our wealth and time should we give to others?"

It is no coincidence that Peter Singer, the leading voice of the animal liberation movement, has also written perhaps the most widely studied and anthologized essay on our ethical obligation to other suffering humans. In "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," Singer argues for relatively affluent Westerners to give to aid agencies at much greater rates in order to prevent suffering and death around the world.[8] Rather than seeing donations to aid agencies as charitable acts, we should reconceive them as our duty. As Singer would have it, we could eliminate poverty and malnourishment in the world if the people of affluent nations were willing to posit the elimination of poverty as a duty.

Singer's prescription for ending world poverty conspicuously fails to include the political and economic system that sustains and necessitates this poverty.[9] Though Singer has harsh words for the capitalists who flaunt their wealth without donating substantively to the impoverished, his critique is individualist rather than structural. The fact that he can include a panegyric to Bill Gates, the richest capitalist in the world, in his work reveals Singer's absolute blindness to politics. The limitation of his thought in this area, as in that of animal rights, stems from his failure to link the idea of social justice to rupture. No matter how much money individuals give to aid agencies, the cherished goals of social justice, such as equality and solidarity, depend on a commitment to rupture that goes beyond monetary donations. The commitment to rupture is necessarily a political rather than just an ethical commitment.

Capitalism as a system couldn't function without impoverished parts of the world where raw materials can be mined cheaply and where labor can generate values unimaginable in the heart of affluent societies. Singer translates a political problem into an ethical one, and in this way he mirrors contemporary geopolitical developments. Rather than fighting wars, the West engages in humanitarian interventions. War is explicitly a political gesture, which is why no one declares war anymore. But the humanitarian intervention, though it may serve as a cover for war making, professes itself as ethical rather than political, which makes it acceptable to the public.

Unlike with war, it is difficult to argue against the idea of the humanitarian intervention. Although one can see that the humanitarian intervention often serves as the cover for bald self-interest (as in the case of the Iraq War, for example), it is another thing to oppose the humanitarian intervention as such. No one is prowar, and almost no one is antihumani-

tarian. But the rarity of the position is not an argument against it. The problem with the humanitarian intervention is not that it serves as a guise for war making but the perspective that inheres in the humanitarianism itself. For the humanitarian, other humans are not political subjects but wounded or potentially wounded beings. This is why Singer's ethics of the aid organization is aligned with humanitarian interventions, even if he personally opposes every one. Singer's morality and the humanitarian intervention require an ethical rather than a political gesture. Instead of taking a side in a conflict, we provide help, which allows the provider to remain neutral. The apparent innocuousness of this ethical gesture bespeaks its perniciousness. We can feel good about our humanitarianism in a way that is impossible for our war making, but to the extent it assumes a central role in the evanescence of politics, the triumph of ethics and the concomitant extinction of human exceptionalism help to create a world in which there are no more barriers to the flow of capital or to its ruthless exploitation of labor and resources. This is the world of the humanitarian gesture.

Without an idea of the human's rupture from its animality, one cannot sustain the vision of a world in which value is defined in some way other than through the commodity. Viewing the human as an animal—and thereby missing the human's inhumanity—provides an ideological support for capitalist relations of production. Each human animal acts only out of its private interest, and the free market is the playground for these competing interests. Those whose interests triumph are the ones who have best capitalized on the value created by the act of production. The value created through the exchange process itself finds an explanation in human animality, not an obstacle.

Shared suffering may link the human to other animals, but it does not provide the basis for articulating any positive values or social alternatives. Concern for the wounded animal leaves intact the social structure that creates or exacerbates the wounds. Ceding the field of the social to biology—or, what is philosophically the same thing, ceding the terrain of politics to ethics—leaves us without any means of escaping a Hobbesian war of all against all, which provides the ideological justification for capitalist relations of production. If each individual has only its own self-interest in mind, then there is no reason to challenge the apotheosis of struggle in capitalism. The turn to biology and to biological explanations of social phenomena marks a clear victory for capitalist ideology.

The understanding of social relations on the basis of struggle has long informed not just the insertion of biology into sociology but also the biological speculation itself. As André Pichot perspicaciously points out,

"Contrary to appearances, social Darwinism is not simply the importation of a biological doctrine into sociology. It was Darwinian biology that had previously imported into biology a sociological doctrine. . . . Darwin himself recognized that his theory was at least in part the transposition into biology of principles drawn from sociology and economics."[10] The idea of natural selection justifies capitalist social relations so well because it has a foot in political economy from the beginning. Biology, even when it produces the severest ethical injunctions, cannot serve as the source for a decisive move away from the ruling social relations. At best, it's neutral, and at worst, it plays the part of an ideological handmaiden.

We seem caught between the horror of exceptionalism on the one hand and the reduction of humanity to its biology on the other. This antinomy exists because we focus solely on either the animal or the human and not on the rupture that generates the distinction. Both those who insist on the animality of the human and those who insist on the humanizing soul that elevates humanity above animals negate the rupture itself. The former deny the existence of any rupture, and the latter try failingly to transform its disruptiveness into the guarantee of superiority. Whereas Peter Singer denies rupture, French philosopher (and former minister of education) Luc Ferry affirms it in emphatic terms and links it to human perfectibility. He claims, "Humanity is defined by perfectibility, by the capacity to lift itself out of natural or historical determinations."[11] But the rupture between the human and the animal does not provide the basis for human superiority or for the reduction of animals to their use value. Instead, it renders the human dislocated and damaged in relation to its being.

This dislocation occurs as the subject enters the system of signification, which uproots and transforms its animal being. By focusing on the rupture between the animal and the human, one can assert an exceptionalism that doesn't entail human superiority or mastery and in fact demands an obligation toward the prevention of animal suffering. Rather than minimizing the difference between the human and other animals, we see this difference as fundamental—not because the human is endowed with a soul that the animal lacks but because, as a speaking subject, the human is no longer simply a living being, in contrast to the rest of the animal world. While other animals are just animals and live out their instincts rather than relating to them, the human animal fails to coincide with itself; it is inhuman. The human is the political animal because of the interruption in its biology; psychoanalysis is the first theory to recognize this interruption that derives from the subject's entrance into the realm of the signifier.

The Psychoanalytic Rupture

The human-animal rupture receives its most detailed theorization in psychoanalytic thought. Freud discovers the inhumanity of the human when he arrives at the insight that the human subject fails to realize its desire even when there are no empirical obstacles blocking this realization. This reveals to him a fundamental distinction between the human and the animal that occurs on the level of how each being satisfies itself. The central contention of psychoanalysis is that a decisive break occurs with the emergence of the speaking being. Though psychoanalysis focuses on speech as ameliorative—it is the "talking cure"—it grasps the signifier as creating a fundamental distortion in the human world. Patients come to the psychoanalyst because they are suffering when they shouldn't be suffering. They suffer from what they can't speak, and Freud's initial cures involved simply prompting patients to speak what they had repressed. It turns out, however, that the damage done by the signifier cannot be so easily repaired. The unspoken wound of the subject cannot simply be spoken but remains immune to speech.[12] This is because the signifier completely changes the human animal.

The speaking being is no longer just an animal that uses language but becomes a deformed animal, utterly changed in its approach to the world.[13] Whereas instinct rules the animal, the human subject—or, more properly, the inhuman subject—is a subject of the drive. The drive is the result of animal instinct passing through the distorting structure of the signifier and of human social relations. The structure of the signifier introduces a radical form of absence into the life of the animal: the signifier provides neither pure presence nor pure absence but a present absence. For the animal that becomes a subject, signifiers replace things, and satisfaction must occur through the structure of the signifier rather than by directly obtaining the satisfying thing. Satisfaction must necessarily involve the experience of absence for the speaking being. Because the system of signification replaces things with signifiers—and presence with present absence—the subject can no longer simply satisfy its instinctual needs. These needs become transformed into drives.

Signification creates a retrospective illusion of loss. The subject of the signifier—or, to say the same thing differently, the subject of the drive—has lost its privileged object as a result of its entrance into signification, but it has lost what it never had. The distortion created by the signifier produces the illusion of an actual object that was lost. But the lost object is not a privileged object that has been lost (like the maternal breast) but an object that attains a privileged status through being lost. The lost

object attains its value for the subject insofar as it is lost, which is why the lost object is always impossible. Throughout its existence, the subject will place forms of this object in its path, and it will repeat its failure to obtain the lost object. The subject will always seek its lost object in whatever particular empirical object it pursues, but no particular object will ever be the lost object. Any object that the subject does obtain ceases at just that point to embody the lost object.[14] Unlike other animals, the human animal that becomes a speaking subject spends all its time repeating the same failure in different guises. This failure to attain the object is the drive's mode of success.

The inhumanity of the human manifests itself in the human capacity for finding satisfaction in—and repeating—failure. Subjects repeat their acts not in order to one day succeed but in order to continue to fail. Even those humans who achieve success continue to risk this success in search of failure because success never provides the ultimate satisfaction that it promises. When one aims at success, one searches for the lost object, but the attainment of success transforms the lost object into a present one and thereby eliminates it altogether. Though we are consciously human and strive to succeed, we are unconsciously inhuman and seek out the repetition of failure. This repetition satisfies the subject of the drive because failure is the only mechanism for sustaining the existence of the lost object. Once one has the object, one discovers that what one has is not *it*. This proclivity for the satisfying failure is not animalistic.

The distinction between instinct and drive attests to the radicality of the rupture between animal and subject.[15] Animal instinct finds the satisfaction of its needs in the objects that it obtains: the hungry animal that eats is no longer hungry but has satisfied this instinct. Though the drive does offer its own form of satisfaction to the subject, this satisfaction is not, as it is with instinct, identical with the fulfillment of a need. Rather than fulfilling the needs of the subject, the drive sustains the subject's desires as desires. The object of the drive provides an occasion for the drive, not a possibility for its satisfaction. This is why Jacques Lacan insists in his *Seminar XI* that "no object of any . . . need . . . can satisfy the drive."[16] The satisfaction of the drive comes from its manner of missing the object rather than the capacity for attaining it. The subject that continues to eat after fulfilling the need for food continues because it enjoys its failure to find the lost object. The subject finds satisfaction in eating even though no food is satisfying. The drive meticulously avoids attaining its object, and it uses this object as a pretext for animating its movement. This trajectory, not the object itself, becomes the source of the subject's satisfaction.

Though early in his career Freud began with the notion of curing the dissatisfaction of his patients, later he comes to recognize that dissatisfaction inheres in the structure of subjectivity and its drive.[17] This inherent dissatisfaction does not necessitate abandoning the psychoanalytic project but rather changing its aims. Instead of trying to cure patients of their dissatisfaction, the psychoanalyst can help to change patients' relationship to this dissatisfaction. The repeated failures of the subject cease to be a symptom of an underlying disorder that one might heal through the proper act of interpretation. They become instead the way that the subject organizes its enjoyment, its drive. If the subject recognizes this, it cannot transform the failures into successes, but it can change the way that it relates to these failures. The subject can view its repeated failures as the expression of the singularity of its subjectivity rather than as an obstacle to overcome.[18]

The contrast between psychoanalysis and contemporary forms of therapy is here quite clear: psychoanalysis treats the analysand as an inhuman subject, while therapy treats the client—a term that points to therapy's kinship with the capitalist economic model—as an animal. From the perspective of most contemporary therapy, success is possible, and the goal of therapy involves helping clients to transform their failures into successes. Instead of failing with their diets, for example, they will succeed after the therapist helps to identify the psychic barriers to success. But this investment in success reveals that the client is nothing but an animal in the eyes of the therapist. Only an animal, in contrast to an inhuman subject, can become successful.

The human subject is exceptional not through its mastery over the rest of the natural world but through its monopoly on failure. Though other animals fail all the time—deer are eaten by lions, polar bears don't catch enough fish to survive, dogs slip on the wet ground, and so on—these failures are empirical. No other animal has failure written into its structure in the way that the human subject does. As Freud shows, human exceptionality derives from human maladaptation—the human incapacity for successfully obtaining its object. This type of exceptionality avoids both the speciesism that Peter Singer criticizes and the danger of reducing the subject to its animality, a danger that has been the singular preoccupation of Giorgio Agamben.

Agamben and the Critique of Ethics

The aftermath of Freud's theorization of the drive as the human rupture from animality has not seen the widespread acceptance of this in-

sight. While some have tried to sustain the traditional form of human exceptionalism, the predominant development in both intellectual and political existence has been the reduction of the human to its biological or animal life. If human exceptionalism justifies untold animal suffering, the abandonment of this exceptionalism provides an inverse justification for human suffering. Without some form of exceptionalism, the creation of value becomes unthinkable, and horrific projects to resurrect it, like the various fundamentalisms that populate the contemporary landscape, quickly emerge. The failure to sustain some form of exceptionalism reduces the subject to the status of an animal and thereby condemns it to its world. Even more than the barbaric production and treatment of animals, the great problem of contemporary society is the reduction of the human to its animality. This reduction is a modern feature of law whose catastrophic consequences Agamben delineates in his analyses of how modern politics came to understand life itself as sacred.[19]

According to Agamben, politics itself is founded on an exercise of sovereignty, on a sovereign act that excludes simple, natural, biological life (*zoē*, or "bare life") in order to found a properly political community (*bios*). For modern political communities, this constitutive act of exclusion, however, fails to eradicate bare life completely. That is to say, though their sovereignty is founded on the exclusion of bare life, it is as if modern political communities remain bewitched by its spell. As Agamben puts it, "Modern democracy presents itself from the beginning as a vindication and liberation of *zoē*, . . . constantly trying to transform its own bare life into a way of life and to find, so to speak, the *bios* of *zoē*."[20] Structurally speaking, sovereign political power is thus for Agamben that which maintains a paradoxical relationship with what defines it—with the natural or animal life whose exclusion constitutes the essence of its sovereignty.

What Agamben defines as the sovereign decision is nothing else than the act that includes life in and through the act of excluding it. He calls this relationship one of "inclusive exclusion,"[21] deeming it "the originary form of law."[22] The problem with modern democracy—and this is, for Agamben, what lies behind the spectacular biopolitical violence of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—is its betrayal of the structural terms of this relationship. Law, rather than foreclosing life, maintaining to it a relation of inclusive exclusion, begins to see it as the immediate truth of politics, as the simple and sacred entity that it is the mandate of the law to deliver and secure. Law, in other words, strives, with disastrous effects, to coincide with life, seeing the very physiology of human beings as its fundamental task. The interpretation of politics through biology and the attempt to reduce the human to its animality contribute to this transfor-

mative betrayal at the heart of law. Insofar as we treat politics under the rubric of biology and proclaim our full animality, we do not liberate the animal but enslave the human. Doing so reflects a fundamental error in our approach to law.

In what way is this desire to *include life* in a modern political community—to fail properly to *exclude it*—a betrayal of the very structural function of law? In his lone reference to Hegel in the book that first introduced the sovereign decision that licensed a kind of killing that was neither murder nor sacrifice, Agamben observes that the primordial sovereign is language itself. He notes, "Hegel was the first to truly understand the presuppositional structure thanks to which language is at once outside and inside itself and the immediate (the nonlinguistic) reveals itself to be nothing but a presupposition of language. . . . Language is the sovereign who, in a permanent state of exception, declares that there is nothing outside language and that language is always beyond itself. The particular structure of law has its foundation in this presuppositional structure of human language."[23] Agamben grasps here what is arguably the crux of Hegel's philosophy, which is that our world, as a world of speaking subjects and meaningful communication, is structured necessarily as the outcome of a sovereign decision, one in which the valorization of the very objects and experiences for which we long (i.e., the immediate, the nonlinguistic, the biological) is always and only retroactive, is capable of being thought only because it has been excluded.

That is to say, we are able to cognize—or, as Agamben would put it, to become open to—the natural or animal world only in and as a result of its being closed to us. Without a rupture from the natural world and from our animality, we cannot think this world. Hegel's championing of logic marks a decisive break in the history of philosophy for just this reason. Whereas philosophical thinking until Hegel concerns itself either with empirically concrete objects or with the forms to which such objects belong—both of whose existences are assumed a priori—Hegel's conception of logic is concerned with the *thinking* of such objects, since it is the conditions under which thinking an object transpires (i.e., thinking an object in its complete abstraction) that constitute its truth.[24]

To think the object or moment in its abstraction involves considering its constitution by language, since it is language that negates the sensuous, inerrant, particular immediacy of the thing or the instant. Words used to name or emphasize the particularity and immediacy of an object—words like "this" or "here" or "now"—presume to capture something meaningfully concrete but in fact still remain abstract. A typesetting quirk in the English translation of *The Phenomenology* captures by accident the way *reference itself* always involves a forsaking of the concrete. When Hegel invokes a "genuine Now" the typesetting displays its definition by dispensing with spaces: "the Now as asimpledaywhichcontainswithinitmanyNows" (*das Itz als einfacher Tag, das viele Itzt in sich hat, Stunden*).[25] Here, we can see how a word capable of really and truly capturing the Now in its concrete particularity would be a word that never stopped being written.

This word, rather than capture or designate a particular thing, would itself be a continuous mark or sound, would be itself a thing, indeed perhaps the *only* thing. Even when we meet with language that dispenses with spaces or evinces other signs of lexical permutations in the name of greater immediacy—as in the case of the typesetting error in *The Phenomenology* or in a work like E. E. Cummings's grasshopper poem or in a novel like Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated* (which runs together without spaces the episode of a man being forced to identify his best friend, who is Jewish, or be shot in the head), we mentally go about the work of separating or arranging the linguistic stream into discrete syntactical units.[26]

In naming language as sovereign, Agamben takes from Hegel the extent to which sovereignty is logical (or linguistic) *before* it is historical. This is the case because the logically sovereign speech act executes a founding cut in language as a whole, a rupture that inaugurates history and makes meaningful knowledge possible. The first sovereign decision, we could say, is really a kind of incision, a gesture that cuts into the undivided biological life of the Now and thereby carves out a space for humans to speak and to understand themselves as temporal beings. As Agamben writes, "For a being whose experience of language was not always split into language and speech—in other words, a primordially speaking being, primordially speaking within an undivided language—there would be no knowledge, no infancy, no history: he would already be directly one with his linguistic nature and would nowhere find any discontinuity or difference where any history or knowledge might be produced."[27] Though logical and historical sovereign decisions work "in exactly the same way," the structural priority of the linguistic sovereign, which signifies, before and beyond its content, "the pure potentiality to signify," means that the linguistic sovereign, and the meanings that emerge in the chain of signification inaugurated by it, have always already something stupid about them.

Nothing guarantees the referential dimension of the linguistic sovereign because this sovereign, in a sense, forms itself. We could say that the identity of the linguistic sovereign announces the impossibility of identity, that the linguistic sovereign is the herald of what Agamben calls "con-

nectedness as lack,"[28] which is essentially what language is. The linguistic sovereign's appearance is thus a gesture, in the sense by which Agamben defines it—the "communication of a communicability."[29] That is to say, the linguistic sovereign is the obstacle and enabler of communication: as that which does not refer meaningfully to something else, it is "an *event* of language,"[30] referring to the very fact of signifying as such. And the very fact of signifying already means that the idyll of a harmonious natural life has been interrupted. Only the event of language—the emergence of the word as such—creates the need to speak.

What ought to become clear here is a truth of significant political consequence to which many are blind: that our words are not concrete instances of meaningful speech or designation, that our words are always abstractions, designating something more than what they appear matter-of-factly to designate. When Agamben claims that language withdraws itself from every concrete instance of speech, that it executes a division that makes meaning possible, he is pointing to the constitutive *universality* of language and to the fact that language wins its power of reference by *getting in between* ourselves and the things we experience or aim to designate. What gets in between ourselves and things is nothing other than the signifier as structural and structuring law. The law that we speak whenever we speak is thus the law of a division constitutive of subjectivity and a social world. The rupture that constitutes this law divides us irremediably from our animal being.

Though we are accustomed to thinking of the "state of exception" as naming an actual location—Auschwitz during World War II or Guantánamo in the twenty-first century—if language is truly the sovereign, then the state of exception is a logical and not a historical locus. It is not the *homo sacer* who by dint of a historically sovereign decision is confined to the state of exception; it is all of us who live in the world of time and language who are confined to such a state. This is why Agamben insists, despite the controversy that he knows will follow, that modern human life takes place in a camp of a kind. If the foreclosure of natural life is a condition of our existence as speaking beings, then natural life exists only in our words and heads. In *The Open,* Agamben suggests that "every space of exception . . . is, in truth, perfectly empty,"[31] and that the making of this logical space into an actual one—inhabited by human beings expelled to it—is a result of repeated decisions that dislocate and displace the sovereign act of the signifier and the fundamental division between human and animal life it inaugurates.

Human subjectivity itself, we could say, contains the original political relation in which something is included in and through its exclusion, provided we understand that what is included is not really included, or is included as something already closed to us. This is why, for Agamben, there is no such thing as a meaningfully subjective experience of infancy and why the belief in a political community that coincides with its simple, biological life constitutes the fundamental (and fundamentally un-Hegelian) fantasy of modern democracy and nation-states.[32] This fantasy tries constantly to "open and secure the not-open in every domain" and thus forgets and forsakes the law that is its condition of possibility.[33] Just as the sensuous pleasures of infancy come to us only after the law's expropriation of such pleasures, so too does the *zoē* of a political community always already contain what Agamben calls the fundamental "biopolitical fracture."[34] The evidence of this fracture is made plain in the manifest symptoms of its disavowal, in the contradictions that inexorably arise when the biological life of a political community is seen as its direct, immediate truth.

Because of its fantasmatic nature, the biological life of a community of people, when posited as its essence and its value, appears always as two contradictory things at once: it is pointed to as already immediately and identifiably vested in the citizens of a political community but also always already usurped or in need of rescue or shoring up. As Agamben puts it (announcing, implicitly, its fantasmatic dimension), "It [the people] is what always already *is* and yet must, nevertheless, be realized; it is the pure source of every identity but must, however, continually be redefined and purified through exclusion, language, blood, and land."[35] The constant attempts to constitute a biological community—to reject the rupture of humanity from its animality—indicate its absence and its impossibility, but the danger arises not through its full constitution (which is impossible) but through the effort to achieve the promise of its bloody fullness.

Opting for Closure

Agamben's insistence on the rupture between human and animal runs throughout his work since *Homo Sacer,* a book that links the reduction of humanity to its animality or the indistinction between the form that life takes and life itself as the fundamental catastrophe of modernity. But this insistence reaches its apex in *The Open,* a book that takes its title and primary concerns from a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke (and from Martin Heidegger's response to that poem).[36] In "The Eighth Elegy" of his *Duino Elegies,* Rilke begins by identifying the natural world or the creature (*die*

Kreatur) with the open. He immediately contrasts the animal's relation to the open with the human's closed-off look, which lacks the absolute freedom of the animal's.

The rupture between human and animal, as recounted in "The Eighth Elegy," is decisive and intractable. Whereas the earlier elegies often contrast humanity with the realm of angels, "The Eighth Elegy" devotes itself wholly to the human-animal rupture. As with Freud and his distinction between the human's drive and the animal's instinct, there is no sense in Rilke's poem that the human has the better part of the bargain. Though he sustains the idea of a human-animal rupture throughout the poem, no one could accuse Rilke of a speciesism that would lead to the modern slaughterhouse. The vast majority of the poem notes the advantages of the animal's look into the open and the absence of any negation in this look. In contrast to the animal and the natural world, the human remains stuck in its world and the negation that sustains it.

Rilke describes the homelessness of the human that the animal doesn't experience. The simple animal, like the gnat, exemplifies the advantages of natural biological life that our inhumanity takes from us. Rilke writes, "Oh bliss of the *tiny* creature which remains / forever inside the womb that was its shelter; / joy of the gnat which, still *within,* leaps up / even at its marriage: for everything is womb" (O Seligkeit der *kleinen* Kreatur, / die immer *bleibt* im Schooße, die sie austrug; / o Glück der Mücke, die noch *innen* hüpft, / selbst wenn sie Hochzeit hat: denn Schooß ist Alles).[37] Rilke's use of the term "womb" (*Schooß*) suggests that the gnat has a shelter that the human lacks, but it also indicates that the animal belongs in the space that it inhabits. The poem doesn't idealize the animal's experience: Rilke recognizes in it "the pain and burden of an enormous sadness" (Gewicht und Sorge einer großen Schwermut). But the poem nonetheless focuses more on what the human has lost and the animal retains. This focus allows Rilke to make the rupture between animality and humanity completely evident.

Finally, at the end of "The Eighth Elegy," Rilke turns back from the animal to the human, and he does so in order to illustrate his own form of human exceptionalism. The human doesn't achieve a completeness or development that animals lack but instead suffers from a fragmented being that animals avoid. As Judith Ryan puts it in *Rilke, Modernism and Poetic Tradition,* "The world that Rilke depicts in the *Elegies* is a collection of fragments that remain in human consciousness like broken columns from an earlier age. . . . Bodily parts—hands and torsos—seem oddly disconnected, and facial expressions—a smile, an upward glance—appear independent of the body to which they belong."[38] The fragmentation of

humanity contrasts with the wholeness of the animal, and it prevents humanity from ever finding itself at home.

Rilke's *Elegies,* for this reason, announce the end of the project of Romantic poetry—to assert or explore a home for the human in nature. In "Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth famously affirmed the existence in nature of "a sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused" that harmonizes and is inseparable from the purest thinking and moral dimension of the human. In Keats and Shelley, the existence of this link becomes more provisional or episodic. In Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale," the communion of the speaker with the beautiful singing of a bird may after all have been a dream. At the end of Shelley's "Mont Blanc," the speaker wants to believe that the strength and power of a mountain amounts to a "secret strength of things / Which governs thought" but concludes by wondering if the "silence and solitude" of elements of nature (a mountain, the earth, the stars, the sea) are not in fact "vacancy."

In Rilke, however, even this questioned status of the human's home in nature is jettisoned. In the end, the fragmented pieces of humanity don't fit together but instead constitute the human through this incompletion or rupture. Rilke's human is always inhuman, unlike the human of Romanticism.

Rather than existing in its world, the human is always apart from it. "The Eighth Elegy" ends with a line that highlights this separation. The poem concludes, "so we live here, forever taking leave" (so leben wir und nehmen immer Abschied).[39] For the sake of the meter, the translator adds the word "here," which doesn't appear in the German original, and this addition detracts from the rupture that Rilke suggests throughout the poem. Unlike the animal, the human has no place in which it can live but is "forever taking leave." This absence of a place or a home is the basis of human exceptionalism, and it lies at the foundation, for Rilke and for us, of all assertions of value. If humans had a "here," then they would live, like animals, a valueless existence.

The possibility inaugurated by the rupture between human and animal, as Rilke conceives it, becomes evident in the final lines of the last of the *Duino Elegies.* In those lines he moves in proximity to Freud and accomplishes a slight change of perspective that results in the total transformation of our judgment. As the conclusion of "The Tenth Elegy" makes clear, we wrongly view the world from the perspective of animality and thus seek pleasure in successes—in moments of accomplishment or success. But "The Tenth Elegy" ends by asking us, just as psychoanalysis does, to reverse our perspective, and this ending would not be possible without the rupture between humanity and animality that Rilke advances

in "The Eighth Elegy." He writes, "And we, who have always thought / of happiness as *rising,* would feel / the emotion that almost overwhelms us / whenever a happy thing *falls*" (Und wir, die an *steigendes* Glück / denken, empfänden die Rührung, / die uns beinah bestürzt, / wenn ein Glückliches *fällt*).[40] The last lines of the final poem of the *Duino Elegies* reveal Rilke's proximity to Freud and the psychoanalytic discovery of the inhuman rupture. Though Rilke famously refused to undergo psychoanalysis out of a fear of losing his ability to write poetry if a psychoanalyst cured him, he shows here that his poetry has already incorporated its most important insights. The act of falling that he celebrates in "The Tenth Elegy" is an act that an animal could not enjoy. Rilke writes the *Duino Elegies* in order to convert the reader into someone who could enjoy falling, into someone who sustains a rupture from animality.

To put it in slightly different terms, Rilke is saying that through our capacity to privilege failure over success and to find satisfaction in failure, we can accomplish a revolutionary change. This revolution requires the abandonment of the sense of ourselves as animals who can succeed just like other animals and an act of avowing our inhuman compulsion to fail. But as difficult as this sounds, it is far more revolutionary than storming the Bastille or overthrowing the czar because it implies a fundamental turn from the promise of a future attainable pleasure to the constancy of a repeated mode of enjoyment. Though this enjoyment involves failure, it is possible for us in a way that future pleasure never can be. One arrives at this enjoyment only through the acceptance of rupture and the refusal of one's status as a biological being. But Rilke's exceptionalism, as we have seen, is not mastery.

Repressive Mastery

One cannot retreat from the threat of biologizing politics to the insistence on exceptionality as a substantive position. Doing so represents another way of avoiding rupture, and it effectuates a repression of rupture. Transforming human exceptionality into a substantive position involves the assertion of human mastery over the animal world. Whereas the subject of the signifier has an alienated relation to its own animality and to other animals, the self-interested social subject exists in a relation of mastery toward other animals. Human dignity—or the installation of a soul in the human body—replaces the disturbance of the drive and affirms its repression. The idea of the soul substantializes the drive and transforms what alienates the subject into the source of its superiority or dignity.

Through this transformation, animals become beings that lack (a soul) in order to disguise the lack that animates subjectivity itself. The subject's lack is transferred to the animal. Human mastery over the animal world is constructed on the chimera of a philosophical inversion.

For most of the history of Western philosophy, the subject's distance from its own animality functions as a license for human mastery. This becomes apparent on even a cursory reading of Elisabeth de Fontenay's weighty history of Western philosophy's attitude toward animals. In *Le silence des bêtes,* de Fontenay illustrates the way that philosophy defined the human through its relation to animality. For most philosophers, the human is opposed and superior to the animal, though there are exceptions. It is always, not surprisingly, the philosophers who turn away from rupture who place animals and humans in the most proximity. De Fontenay singles out Plotinus, the philosopher who dulls the Platonic rupture, as a friend of animality. She notes, "He gives, in power if not in act, an equal dignity to all living beings."[41] Plotinus, like Schopenhauer centuries later and a few others, manages to avoid the recourse to opposing humanity to animality. What de Fontenay doesn't recognize, however, is the price that these philosophers pay for abandoning rupture.

The idea of mastery exists in the philosophy of Aristotle, and it would shape subsequent Western thought. He thinks of animals in instrumental terms, just as he thinks of slaves and women.[42] There is a break but not an absolute rupture, which would become evident only in modernity. This view continues throughout the Christian Middle Ages. The crowning figure of medieval Christian theology, Thomas Aquinas, rejects the possibility that cruelty toward animals can be a wrong in itself. Such cruelty is sinful only insofar as it hardens the heart of the human who perpetuates it. For Aquinas, however, human and animal exist on a continuum that reaches up to God. Their difference is radical, but it nonetheless allows for comparison. Even this becomes impossible with the dawn of modernity and Cartesian philosophy.

With the emergence of Cartesian philosophy at the beginning of the seventeenth century, Western philosophy thus not only asserts a conception of subjectivity as self-grounding and thus alienated from its world, but also, through the figure of Descartes, proposes a complete rupture between humanity and animality. The idea of a continuum linking animal to human gives way to a more violent separation. The difference becomes absolute as the human acquires a soul distinguishing it from the machinelike animal.[43] Both the human and nonhuman animal share a material body, but the soul saves the human from being condemned to mere bodily existence and also grants the human mastery over the material animal world.

For many proponents of animal rights, Descartes is one of the chief villains, if not public enemy number one. As the parent figure of modern philosophy, he isolates subjectivity as the privilege of humanity in a way that will condemn all other animals to the role of instruments used in the self-assertion of the human subject. As Tom Regan contends in *Empty Cages,* Descartes is responsible for the widespread view that animals, as purely material beings, lack any thought, which means that humans can treat them with the utmost barbarism without at the same time becoming barbaric. According to Regan, "For Descartes, animals are not aware of anything. Set a puppy on fire. Skin a harp seal alive. Neither feels a thing. The animals of the world are as mindless as the Energizer Bunny."[44] The particularly violent images that Regan chooses here are not unfair: Descartes and Cartesian philosophy have a direct role in extreme forms of animal suffering.

Animal experimentation became popular among Descartes and his adherents because it allowed one to augment one's understanding of material being without causing pain and suffering to the soul. Experimenting on humans, in contrast, would damage a soul with the body. Animal rights advocate Gary Francione describes this experimentation in detail, along with Descartes's own defense of the practice. He states, "Descartes and his followers performed experiments in which they nailed animals by their paws onto boards and cut them open to reveal their beating hearts. They burned, scaled, and mutilated animals in every conceivable manner. When the animals reacted as if they were suffering pain, Descartes dismissed the reaction as no different from the sound of a machine that was functioning improperly. A crying dog, Descartes maintained, is no different from a whining gear that needs oil."[45] Though few take such a cavalier attitude toward animal suffering today, there remain philosophers who defend the Cartesian subject and regard it as essential for any philosophy worthy of the name.[46]

At the beginning of *The Ticklish Subject,* Slavoj Žižek announces that his book "endeavours to reassert the Cartesian subject." Žižek does not simply want to resurrect traditional Cartesian thought or "to return to the *cogito* in the guise in which this notion has dominated modern thought (the self-transparent thinking subject), but to bring to light its forgotten obverse, the excessive, unacknowledged kernel of the *cogito,* which is far from the pacifying image of the transparent Self."[47] The Cartesian subject that Žižek identifies here is the subject of the drive that emerges with the rupture from animality and that is repressed in the subsequent proclamation of the soul's existence and the attendant claims of human mastery. Through Descartes's initial identification of subjectivity with rupture, he

gives a form to the subject that psychoanalysis would later affirm as its own. The Cartesian subject of rupture is the psychoanalytic subject of the drive, though the subsequent subject of mastery marks a retreat from drive to ego. It would require Freud to reassert the proper priority.[48]

With Descartes, the idea of rupture becomes essential to the assertion of subjectivity. But rupture also allows for the subject to view animals as beings that need our concern rather than as just instruments or food. The idea of continuity between human and animal leads to the assumption that animals, like humans, have rights commensurate with their responsibilities. This idea reaches its culminating point with medieval animal trials, in which courts tried animals as if they had moral responsibility for their wrongdoing.[49] Legislation to protect animals requires, in contrast, animals that are not responsible and cannot stand trial and yet still require protection. Such animals emerge only through a radical human-animal rupture.

Ironically, it is idea of subjectivity founded on rupture that makes possible laws for the protection of animal welfare. Of course, Descartes himself was not a warrior for animal rights, and those who were were probably not readers or followers of Descartes. But the break that he recognizes and affirms plays an indispensable part in the emergence of concern for animal welfare as a possibility. Without the rupture of modern subjectivity, there would be no animal welfare legislation. All animal liberationists who curse the philosophical influence of Descartes (and retroactively wish for the more humane Montaigne to replace him as the parent of modern philosophy) necessarily elide this crucial point.

The first significant animal cruelty legislation is contemporaneous with the development of Cartesian philosophy. In 1635, the Irish Parliament passed an act prohibiting plowing by the use of the animal's tail and pulling (instead of sheering) the wool off live sheep, and in 1641 (the year of the publication of Descartes's *Meditations*), Massachusetts enacted a law forbidding cruelty to animals kept for human use. Descartes's philosophy did not directly inform the writing of this animal cruelty legislation; yet the historical coincidence between the assertion of subjectivity and the concern for animal suffering is not simply contingent. Though the idea of a subject of mastery enables animal experimentation and an untold quantity of barbarism directed toward animals, the rupture with animality that makes this subject possible—the rupture that defines the subject of the drive—creates a distinction in which concern can emerge.[50] Without the break between the animal and the human, concern for animals without holding animals to a human standard of moral behavior would remain unthinkable. It is from within the rupture that concern for the ani-

mal arises. The rupture asserts a radical difference through which animal suffering becomes a problem, and at the same time it does not necessarily involve the assertion of human superiority. In order to see how to distinguish between the possibility of concern for the animal and the claim of superiority over the animal within the Cartesian gesture, one must examine the trajectory that his thought takes in the *Meditations*.

The Cartesian philosophical move consists of two distinct gestures. All his philosophical radicality resides in the first, and the second houses the conservatism that leads ultimately to factory farming. An attentive reading of the *Meditations* can discern the exact point where the one Descartes becomes the other. He begins the First Meditation with the project of radical doubt as he enumerates the various ways in which what we take for truth ends up being error. Through the first two mediations, Descartes sustains this project of doubting everything that he typically presumes to be true. As is well-known, doubt concludes with one certainty—the certainty that Descartes is thinking while he doubts. Up to this point, Descartes remains within the rupture. The subject of doubt adheres to the rupture, and the rupture from the rest of being produces the capacity for doubting everything. Doubt is a rupture in being: the one who doubts interrupts the flow of being by calling this flow into question. Unlike the ideas and perceptions that Descartes doubts, the doubt itself has no direct cause within the world of representation. The subject can doubt because of its divide from the rest of being, because of the rupture that constitutes it.

At the conclusion of the Second Meditation, Descartes affirms the certainty, attained through the project of radical doubt, that he is a thinking thing. Here, he substantializes the subject of the rupture, illegitimately arguing for the existence of a thinking thing on the basis of the existence of a doubting subject. This marks the beginning of the turn away from rupture and toward mastery, but the repression of rupture doesn't become fully realized until near the conclusion of the Third Meditation, where Descartes formulates his version of the ontological proof for the existence of God. In whatever form it takes, the ontological proof implicitly denies the possibility of a rupture in being.[51] It affirms a continuity, rather than an interruption, between being and thought. Descartes famously contends, "The mere fact that I exist and have within me the idea of a most perfect being, that is, God, provides a very clear proof that God indeed exists."[52] As Descartes sees it, no idea can be the result of a creation ex nihilo; God cannot name a rupture in being that enables us to think this concept but must instead testify to the actual existence of such a being. With this proof, Descartes insists that being is continuous, in direct contradiction to his earlier conception of a subject who doubts. This later subject, who has the assurance that God exists, is the one who feels secure in his domination of animal life. Although the Descartes of the first two meditations is an unknowing forefather of animal welfare legislation, the Descartes of the third is the forefather of the modern slaughterhouse.

The distinction between the subject of the rupture and the subject of mastery in the philosophy of Descartes is not merely an obscure theoretical distinction. It is essential for any assertion of concern for animality that hopes to avoid the reduction of the human to its animality. As Descartes calls into question all the apparent guarantees that populate his experience, he articulates a rupture in being that enables the concern for animality. As he retreats from this rupture into a new form of being's continuity, he authorizes a new level of barbarism in the treatment of animals. The second gesture—the repression of rupture—informs all his proclamations about human dignity and superiority.

After Descartes goes through his second version of the ontological proof in the Fifth Meditation, he notes that certainty about God functions as a foundation for all human knowledge. He says, "The certainty and truth of all knowledge depends uniquely on my awareness of the true God, to such an extent that I was incapable of perfect knowledge about anything else until I became aware of him."[53] As a reasoning being capable of true knowledge, the subject attains dignity and a soul, but the price of this dignity is the abandonment of the radicality of doubt and what doubt entails. The existence of God provides the assurance that the doubting subject can actually rely on its clear and distinct perceptions, which allow it to reason about the world. This is the faculty that animals lack and that produces human dignity. The assertion of human dignity (and thus superiority over the animal world) transforms the alienation of the doubting subject into the certainty of the subject of mastery, and this transformation effects a profound repression. There is no human dignity without the repression of the rupture—which means that there is no human dignity. The human is inevitably undignified, just as it is inevitably inhuman.

The Psychotic Singer

But for those who want to assert the continuity of animal and human being, a different form of negation of rupture must sustain their enterprise. Rather than repressing the rupture through the assertion of mastery, the animal liberationist forecloses the master signifier of law that marks the

separation. This foreclosure doesn't result in the animal liberationist's hearing voices, but it does produce a position homologous with that of the psychotic. Whereas the psychotic is unable to differentiate between the terrain of reality and that of imagination, the animal liberationist cannot distinguish between human and animal suffering.

The rupture between the instinctual animal and the subject of the drive involves a completely distinct relationship between suffering and enjoyment in the case of animal and human. This complicates the attempt to align animal and human suffering in the way that animal liberationists, such as Peter Singer, would like. Singer argues for the extension of rights to animals on the basis of the capacity that they share with human animals for suffering and enjoyment.[54] He claims, "No matter what the nature of the being, the principle of equality requires that its suffering be counted equally with the like suffering—insofar as rough comparisons can be made—of any other being. If a being is not capable of suffering, or of experiencing enjoyment or happiness, there is nothing to be taken into account."[55] Singer subtly moves from the idea of beings that experience "like suffering" to beings that are "capable of suffering." Clearly, animals and humans are both capable of suffering, but it isn't at all evident that they experience "like suffering."

As Singer sees it, the existence of a capacity for suffering and for enjoyment allows us to compare the situations of disparate beings. Though fish and humans may share little biology, environment, or culture, what they have in common is the capacity for suffering and enjoyment. This shared capacity creates a scale that measures the suffering of fish killed for food against the enjoyment of the human who eats it. The scale also enables Singer to make his most controversial argumentative move: he compares the suffering and enjoyment of animals to the suffering and enjoyment of severely mentally disabled human beings. For Singer, the comparison is apt because there is no absolute difference between humans and other animals. The only claim for such a difference relies on the thoroughly ideological conception of the soul or the amorphous (and thus philosophically inadmissible) idea of human dignity. Proponents of human difference are guilty of speciesism, a prejudice every bit as noxious as racism or sexism and a prejudice having just as little philosophical justification. According to Singer's position, euthanasia of the severely disabled or the terminally ill presents less of a moral problem than the killing of animals for scientific or industrial experimentation.

The argument for some form of animal rights is compelling because it illustrates the dubiousness underlying assertions of human superiority and at the same time the ubiquity of the capacity for suffering and enjoyment throughout the range of the animal world. But Singer does not discuss the relationship between suffering and enjoyment as it manifests itself differently in speaking subjects and in animals. For Singer, suffering is of a piece, and this view marks the philosophical weakness of his position. Like animal beings, the subject of the signifier suffers and enjoys, but what separates the subject from its animality is precisely its ability to enjoy its suffering. The great insight of psychoanalysis is that subjects do not simply suffer or enjoy; instead, they enjoy their suffering and suffer their enjoyment. This distances them not just from other animals but also from their own animality.

The turn from instinct to the drive involves a transformation of a being's relationship to suffering and enjoyment. The drive is an imposition on the subject; the subject suffers from the drive and suffers the enjoyment that the drive provides. Subjects can find enjoyment in the most self-destructive forms of behavior, and enjoyment is inextricable from the self-destructiveness. The drive enables subjects to enjoy a cigarette that will produce cancer, to enjoy a fight that will damage the body, and to enjoy a relationship that will lead to misery.[56] We don't enjoy these things in spite of the damage they inflict but because of it. This is the dimension of enjoyment proper to the subject. Even though animals may enjoy behaviors that bring some suffering, the enjoyment is not in their case tied to the suffering.[57] The contemporary consumption of commodities provides the most striking instance of this enjoyment: subjects consume not to fulfill needs but excessively, and the excess consumption continually harms their self-interest. The drive provides the foundation for the excesses of consumption and renders this excess enjoyable. The subject of the drive enjoys acts that enhance its suffering and abasement.

The being of instinct, in contrast, experiences a thoroughgoing distinction between its suffering and its enjoyment. Instinct tells it to flee suffering and to seek enjoyment, while the subject of the drive often seeks suffering in order to constitute its enjoyment. There is no masochism among beings of instinct, whereas there is almost nothing but masochism—or its vicissitudes—among subjects of the drive. This is because of the vastly different figures of satisfaction offered by instinct and by the drive. Instinct locates satisfaction in the attainment of the object; the drive locates it in the failed relation to the object. The enjoyment of the drive is constituted through failure rather than success, while the enjoyment that instinct offers depends solely on the successful fulfilling of the instinctual need.

The unnatural path of the subject's enjoyment attests to its rupture from animality. The human subject can no longer enjoy itself in the way that a human animal might, and the failure to think through this dis-

tinction leads not just to the dangers of biopower that Agamben chronicles but also to an inability to understand why subjects act in the ways that they do. For Peter Singer, we can place all our actions in a calculus of enjoyment and suffering in order to determine the proper course to take. But if suffering is inextricably tied up with our enjoyment, then the proper course will never be so easy to discern. The best course may be the one that entails the most suffering, and the one to avoid may be the one that promises nothing but enjoyment. As long as we confuse the human's form of enjoyment with the animal's, we will be incapable of making such decisions.

The Disavowed Steak

The distinction between human enjoyment and that of other animals has no place in Peter Singer's philosophy of animal liberation. But despite this philosophical misstep, one cannot but sense that he is onto something when he recounts the senseless barbarism of animal experimentation or the unthinking cruelty of the factory farm. These phenomena cannot be simply anomalies of modernity, the residual kernel of a surpassed brutality. But combating animal cruelty today cannot take on the form that Singer suggests. Instead of eliminating the divide between human and animal, the struggle on behalf of animals must insist on this rupture. By doing so, we can identify precisely why human cruelty toward animals not only persists in modernity but also actually grows exponentially. Animals suffer today like never before, and this suffering has its cause not in the efficiency of the factory farm but in the form of inhuman enjoyment that separates humans from animals. The treatment of animals today follows from our enjoyment of them, an enjoyment that requires their suffering and that functions through a process of fetishistic disavowal. Only a theory of rupture enables us to come to grips with this enjoyment and thereby pose the problem of animal rights in a completely new way.

Contemporary meat eating finds its explicit justification in the idea of human mastery and the appeal to instinctual need. As human animals, as beings of instinct, we are omnivorous (and thus carnivorous). But the enjoyment that meat eating produces today has nothing to do with instinctual need and everything to do with the satisfaction of the drive.[58] The appeal to our omnivorous nature can have no more traction. The enjoyment of meat depends on the disavowed knowledge of the incredible cruelty that produces the food that we can eat. Though much information about the conditions under which animals exist is in circulation,

those who eat meat often actively refuse to know in order to sustain their enjoyment. This refusal to know in order to continue to enjoy is fetishistic disavowal, a process integral to our ability to live with the horror of our own enjoyment.

Because the drive depends on not having and not obtaining the object, unlike instinct it demands continual sacrifice. In order to enjoy the object, we must destroy the object so that it remains inaccessible and thereby retains its sublimity. Without sacrifice, we would get what we want and be confronted with not wanting it. Sacrifice saves us from the horror of fully obtaining the object. Conscious knowledge of this sacrifice troubles our ability to endure our own enjoyment because it exposes not just the cruelty that our enjoyment demands but also our own role in constituting the inaccessibility of the object. To avoid this conscious knowledge, we create the fetish, the figure that permits us to know and at the same time not to know. In English, the term "meat" itself functions as a fetish, as it distinguishes the food that we eat from the animal killed to create that food. But the fetishism of meat eating extends far beyond this single term. It finds its quietest and yet most profound expression in the inconspicuousness of the slaughterhouse. Not only are today's slaughterhouses isolated from population centers but they are also guarded by security forces that will not allow any images from the inside to reach the public. We guard our slaughterhouses as tightly as we do our nuclear facilities.

Yet everyone knows what goes on inside the slaughterhouse. We all know that the cruelty that takes place there would revolt even the most heartless individuals and would give them pause before biting into their hamburger. But as long as this knowledge remains disavowed, it can serve as a vehicle for our enjoyment rather than a disruption of our appetite. When we eat meat, we enjoy the brutal sacrifice that goes into its production, and it is this sacrifice that produces the excessive defiance of the proud meat eater. With every bite, one affirms and enjoys the sacrifice of the animal without allowing this sacrifice to come to consciousness. The meat eater is driven to eat meat but doesn't need to eat it. The role that disavowed knowledge has in meat eating becomes clear through the refusal of meat eaters to learn the details of meat production.

The meat eater's claim that "I don't want to know where this came from" attests to disavowed knowledge about the food's origins. If one didn't already know, one couldn't know that one didn't want to know. But sustaining the knowledge in this disavowed state is the only way to sustain the enjoyment of the drive. Disavowal is not simply a supplementary activity to our enjoyment but essential to its functioning. Knowing how we enjoy forces us to adopt a new relation to our own enjoyment

and demands that we undergo a complete psychic revolution, and this is the revolution that an understanding of the rupture between the human and the animal makes possible. In contrast, preserving our enjoyment as it is depends on a committed effort on behalf of ignorance.[59]

In J. M. Coetzee's novel *Elizabeth Costello,* the eponymous protagonist, herself a novelist, gives a pair of lectures on the human treatment of animals. At one point in the lectures, she makes an extended analogy between the Nazi treatment of the Jews and our treatment of animals. The problems with this analogy are self-evident, and Coetzee explicitly addresses them by assigning them to other characters in the novel. Costello's analogy does not go unchallenged by these other characters, and it isn't even at all clear that she speaks for Coetzee. But at the heart of Costello's analogy is an indictment of German ignorance that resonates in the contemporary treatment of animals.

Rather than insisting that ordinary Germans actually did know about the death camps (which is the typical charge), Costello insists that they are guilty not for their knowledge but for their ignorance. In describing the Germans who lived under the Nazis, she states, "They lost their humanity, in our eyes, because of a certain willed ignorance on their part. Under the circumstances of Hitler's kind of war, ignorance may have been a useful survival mechanism, but that is an excuse which, with admirable moral rigour, we refuse to accept."[60] By not knowing what was happening to the Jews, ordinary Germans sustained their enjoyment of Nazism, which the death camps underwrote. Guilt comes from continuing to enjoy one's identity as a German through the disavowal of the systematic slaughter that is integral to that identity, and Costello sees something similar at work in the contemporary refusal of knowledge that occurs at almost every mealtime.

Recognizing this enjoyment doesn't necessarily mean refusing to eat meat, but it does mean refusing the disavowal that allows the enjoyment of meat to continue uninterrupted. Refusing the disavowal involves taking up one's position as a subject of the drive, as a being who has parted ways with its animality. This is the implicit project of the onslaught of contemporary books and films documenting the hidden production history of the hamburger (or other type of meat). In books such as Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Eating Animals* and films like Richard Linklater's *Fast Food Nation* (2006) and Robert Kenner's *Food, Inc.* (2008), a new form of political activism has emerged. By providing unpleasant knowledge about the creation of meat, these works force readers and spectators

to confront their own enjoyment and to decide how they will relate to this enjoyment. Though they acknowledge our biological status as omnivores, their mere existence indicates that this status is not our destiny.

It is because we are subjects of the drive rather than just another animal that we can decide not to eat animals. The subject of the drive is not the master of the animal world nor is it a superior being. It is rather a being of dislocation and rupture. Foregrounding rupture enables us to rethink the idea of animal rights while retaining a form of human exceptionalism. Though we cannot straightforwardly work to minimize the suffering of subjects of the drive without at the same time negatively impacting their enjoyment (and thus provoking their resistance), we can do so with regard to instinctual beings. It is precisely because a rupture exists between the animal and the human (and within the human itself) that we can distinguish animal suffering as a rectifiable problem. We cannot eliminate it, but we can minimize it.

Human suffering, in contrast, will remain intractable, which is why the ideal of happiness—in contrast to realizable and even realized ideals such as freedom, equality, and solidarity—will never cease to prove illusory. No subjects pursue happiness, despite all their conscious planning in this direction. Happiness, despite what the Declaration of Independence proclaims, is not a human value, and it is only the totalitarian state that tries to realize human happiness. For the subject of the drive, suffering cannot be delinked from enjoyment. This profound connection separates the subject from animal life and locates it as a disturbance within the continuity of life. The fact that the human subject suffers its enjoyment and enjoys its suffering provides the sole basis for human exceptionalism. This exceptionalism sets a limit on our ability to transform society. Whatever transformation we accomplish must carry with it the right to suffer and to destroy our prospects of happiness.

In his late notebooks, Friedrich Nietzsche makes a counterintuitive pronouncement concerning his fellow travelers in philosophy. He states, "To those human beings who are of any concern to me I wish suffering, desolation, sickness, ill-treatment, indignities—I wish that they should not remain unfamiliar with profound self-contempt, the torture of self-mistrust, the wretchedness of the vanquished."[61] This wish for the suffering of others is not an expression of Nietzsche's sadism or any other perversion. Though he never says so directly, Nietzsche apprehends the connection between suffering and enjoyment that determines the trajectory of the subject. One cannot extricate the subject's capacity for enjoyment from its capacity for suffering—and it is this link that irremediably

divorces the subject from its animality. It is this link that constitutes the human exception. Concern for animality derives from our attention to the moment of divorce between animality and humanity, without which we are condemned to imagine ourselves either as prosthetic animals or as fallen gods.

CONCLUSION

Theorizing from the Rubble

The idea of rupture as the source of political values has a growing number of champions in contemporary thought. Though different thinkers have a variety of terms for what we call rupture, the idea itself has become widespread. As we argued at the outset, it appears most evidently in the event of Alain Badiou, the gesture of Giorgio Agamben, and the act of Slavoj Žižek. Our development of the idea in the preceding chapters represents an attempt to formalize rupture's increasing prominence. The other theorists of rupture have made occasional appearances throughout the book, but they have remained predominantly in the background. In each chapter, we identify a discoverer of a political value out of rupture: the Jews discover belief; Plato identifies universality; Christians recognize solidarity; Descartes uncovers equality; Kant finds freedom; Kierkegaard insists on singularity; and Freud grasps the inhuman as that which distinguishes humanity. We have privileged those movements and thinkers whose commitment to rupture enabled them to grasp its capacity for the generation of political values.

But we might also identify a present-day adherent for each of these values who sustains the project begun by the original discoverers. These theorists attempt to sustain certain values through an insistence on their connection with rupture. They reveal the theoretical fecundity of rupture as an idea, and they trace its political importance. The possibilities for rupture are already evident in this theoretical work, and the task of our book has involved an effort to remain faithful to these possibilities. But the book would not be complete without providing a sense of just how widespread the idea of rupture's political fecundity has become.

In the introduction, we identify Slavoj Žižek as one of the central proponents of rupture in contemporary philosophy. Throughout his philosophical career, Slavoj Žižek has been an unremitting critic of belief. Though we live in a predominantly secular age of cynicism with regard to belief, he refuses to take this cynicism at face value. From the appearance

of his first book in English in 1989, Žižek reveals that cynicism hides a structure of belief that manifests itself in how subjects act. *The Sublime Object of Ideology* depicts the functioning of ideological fantasy in spite of the disbelief that its adherents express. At the moment when contemporary subjects envision themselves as cynical disbelievers, their actions betray them as believers. Though they know, for instance, that the commodity has no substantial value, they act as if it did and thereby reveal a belief to which they would never own up. To paraphrase one of Žižek's own book titles, they know not what they believe. But the problem with this belief of the cynic as well as that of the fundamentalist is that it fails to leave an opening for genuine belief—belief connected to rupture.

Though we have become cynics who secretly believe, we have lost the capacity for belief like that of the Jews who recognized the rupture within signification and the missing signifier that it produces. As Žižek puts it in *The Parallax View,* "Both liberal-skeptical cynicism and fundamentalism thus share a basic underlying feature: the loss of the ability to believe in the proper sense of the term. For both of them, religious statements are quasi-empirical statements of direct knowledge: fundamentalists accept them as such, while skeptical cynics mock them."[1] For a self-proclaimed atheist like Žižek, the prospect of "the loss of the ability to believe" should seem salutary, but his lament here has its origin in an understanding of the necessary role that belief has in all political struggle. Unless one avows the missing signifier, one remains a prisoner of the ruling authority and its formulation of structural permanence. All of Žižek's critique of contemporary hidden belief has as its aim engendering the possibility of a genuine belief—a belief in a missing God rather than the knowledge of a present one. Žižek writes in order that we can believe again.[2]

If Žižek has become the theoretical advocate of belief stemming from rupture, Joan Copjec functions today as the primary defender of universality insofar as it is the product of rupture. Copjec's sense of universality is inextricable from her position as a feminist. Her brand of feminism, however, runs counter to the prevailing versions, especially those that emphasize the construction of sex. There are universals, as Copjec sees it, because we cannot reduce sexual difference to a social construction. The rupture between the structural position of the man and that of the woman is the site at which universality emerges. The sexual antagonism—the irreconcilable logical organization of male and female subjectivity—enables us to make universal claims by attesting to the limitations of our (and every) particular social order.

The great threat to universality, as Copjec sees it, is constructionism, a philosophy that begins with the idea of cultural contextualization and

the impossibility of surpassing one's particular social order. The culminating chapter of Copjec's unsurpassable *Read My Desire* advances the claim that sex is not reducible to social construction precisely because it is the result of the failure of construction—a rupture within construction. She claims, "When we speak of language's failure with respect to sex, we speak not of its falling short of a prediscursive object but of its falling into contradiction with itself. Sex coincides with this *failure,* this inevitable contradiction."[3] By homologizing sexual difference with the Kantian antinomies of pure reason, Copjec exposes the contradiction with itself that besets every discursive order. Her insistence on this inevitable contradiction is at once an insistence on the universal and its provenance. Copjec's universality is not transcendent in relation to the social order but instead emerges out of the social order's failure to be complete—out of its internal rupture.

Kojin Karatani thinks at a great distance from Copjec, both geographically and theoretically. She is an American feminist, and he is a Japanese Marxist. And yet they both belong to the contemporary resuscitation of rupture and are among the defenders of the political values that emerge from rupture. Karatani does not attempt to refer his Marxism back to the Christian rupture. Nonetheless, he represents one of the most important voices for solidarity today that has its basis not in community or in shared values but in rupture. In his most significant book, *Transcritique on Kant and Marx,* Karatani identifies Kant as the necessary precursor of Marx because Kant theorizes parallax, a concept that would later become crucial in Marx's understanding of capitalism.[4] Parallax indicates the internal division of every structure, and this division appears as an internal otherness: in Kant's case, this internal otherness is, ironically enough, the thing in itself. Efforts at solidarity have failed, according to Karatani, because Leftists have not taken capitalism's parallax or rupture sufficiently into account.

The internal rupture of capitalism occurs by way of its production of surplus value. Unlike more traditional Marxist philosophers, Karatani insists on a separation between the production of surplus value (through labor) and its realization (through the sale of the commodity). Though traditionally Leftist activity has focused on the production of surplus value and the worker's struggle, Karatani grasps that it is at the point where surplus value must be realized when the worker—now the consumer—gains the upper hand. Understanding capitalism's rupture within itself paves the way for solidarity between workers and consumers, which represents the only possibility for altering the capitalist structure. Karatani's theorization of parallax as rupture reveals how capitalism itself lays the

groundwork for the solidarity necessary to combat it. For all the contemporary thinkers of rupture, capitalism is a problem because of the way in which it necessarily obscures rupture through its very structure, but this problem finds a solution in the thought of Karatani, who brings capitalism's rupture within itself to the fore of his philosophy.

Rupture is more prominent in the thought of Alain Badiou than in that of any other current thinker. His notion of the event is a way of theorizing rupture as the source of whatever values make life worth living. Even if an event goes horribly wrong (like the 1917 Soviet Revolution and its culmination in Stalinism), that is preferable to living as a mere nonbeing without any event to give one's life direction. Though the rupturing event is the source of all value for Badiou, the value to which he returns again and again is that of equality. Because the event breaks from the prevailing situation in which natural and cultural inequality rules the day, it acts as a great leveler that returns being to its original indiscernible status.

Badiou is a Marxist who eschews the economic analysis of capitalism. In contrast to Karatani (who identifies capitalism's internal rupture and the possibility for creating a political value from this rupture), Badiou rules out entirely the possibility of an economic event. The event is a political intervention designed to counter the effects of economic calculation. In his commentary on Badiou's thought, this emphasis on equality leads Bruno Bosteels to say, "On the political plane, I am tempted to conclude that Badiou is first a communist before being, indeed without being at the same time a Marxist."[5] Though Bosteels later backpedals somewhat from this statement, it does nonetheless capture something essential about Badiou's project. The event is a political rupture that restores the equality that economic activity has undermined. On the political plane, all participants have an equal opportunity to become partisans of the event, but economics always involves the distribution of more and less. Badiou dismisses the possibility of an economic event because he can't imagine an economic rupture that could give birth to equality.

Unlike Alain Badiou, who spent his entire philosophical career struggling on behalf of rupture against the theorists of human finitude like Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida, Catherine Malabou began as Derrida's student. For Derrida, ruptures like that between human and animal are not the site at which values emerge but are rather modes of obscuring differences and multiplicities within the human or the animal. Rupture functions as a closure of possibilities that the deconstruction of metaphysics attempts to reopen. But Malabou returns to metaphysics—and especially to Hegel—to find a version of rupture that she labels plasticity. Plasticity is the capacity for an impossible transformation, a transformation that surpasses the causes that would lead to it. That is which is plastic has or gives form in the very explosion of form. Malabou discovers plasticity in the unlikeliest of places—in the Hegelian absolute, which for Derrida and countless other thinkers represents philosophy's complete resistance to authentic transformation; in the Heideggerian paean to the simple, which, even though Heidegger himself remained blind to it, actually reveals a schizoid dimension; and in neuroscientific discoveries regarding the human brain, which confirm our capacity to creatively and miraculously transform our lifeworlds.

We are free, as Malabou conceives it, not because we lack biological or cultural determinations but because within our biology and our culture there exists a fundamental plasticity. "Being is *nothing but* its plasticity," Malabou argues.[6] This does not mean that the subject is in a constant state of flux or remains infinitely malleable but that at any moment the impossible might occur *because it already has*—a complete rupture with the past can take place. When we attain the absolute, according to Malabou's reading of Hegel in *The Future of Hegel,* we reach the point of absolute closure and of absolute plasticity. When we become proximate to Being, according to Malabou's reading of Heidegger in *Le change Heidegger,* we experience an ontological plasticity in a moment that is fundamentally one of change, mutation, or metamorphosis.[7] For Malabou, closure is the prerequisite for rupture and thus for freedom, not a barrier to it. The absolute is a rupture that attests to our freedom from the determinations that constitute us as subjects. By rereading the Hegelian absolute as plasticity, Malabou inaugurates a complete break from Derrida—one that she herself does not fully acknowledge—and installs herself among the contemporary thinkers of rupture.[8]

Giorgio Agamben is somewhat in the position of Catherine Malabou. His intellectual coming of age occurred at a small seminar conducted by Martin Heidegger, and he might well have become a philosopher in Heidegger's phenomenological tradition. But just as Malabou broke from Derrida through the influence of Hegel, Walter Benjamin, as Agamben himself recounts, saved him from Heidegger and made him into a philosopher of rupture. Though Agamben's concern throughout his works lies in analyzing the breakdown of political community and in establishing a new form of community, community for him remains inseparable from the affirmation of singularity. The basis for community is the rupture of the singular from its cultural determinations. Nowhere is this thesis more evident than in *The Coming Community.*

The Coming Community opens with a tribute to singularity. Agamben identifies singularity not with a particular genetic code or a human soul

but with what he calls our whatever being or our thusness.[9] Singularity arises not through how we appear but by way of the appearing of our appearing. The rupture that occasions our appearance marks us as singular beings. According to Agamben, this singularity is evident in our "being-called" or our "being-in-language," though it renders us irreducible to purely linguistic beings. The fact that we appear in language with a name transcends the authority of language. For Agamben, it is not language itself, as an instrument, that has authority but rather the singular being that elects to be responsible for his or her name, elects to tie his or her words to his or her actions. This is, for Agamben, the decisive significance of the oath, the utterer of which embodies a singularity or whatever being that escapes all its determinations, and in so doing announces the possibility of political and ethical commitments and communities.[10] The only possible community, as Agamben theorizes it, resides in these singularities coming together through an affirmation of the rupture—or the irreparable—that makes their language distinctively human or that gives them their existence. Even when Agamben attempts to think through the constitution of a new community, he does so by holding fast to the singularity caused by rupture. But Agamben also shares Lee Edelman's concern with the inhumanity of those who make up this community.

In *No Future,* Lee Edelman's project involves marrying queer theory to psychoanalysis—or showing how both share the same fundamental issues. In contrast to other psychoanalytic thinkers, however, Edelman makes explicit his hostility to politics, and he attributes this to his investment in queerness. Rather than present himself as a political philosopher, Edelman sees his task and that of queerness as the disruption of politics. He notes, "Far from partaking of this narrative movement toward a viable political future, far from perpetuating the fantasy of meaning's eventual realization, the queer comes to figure the bar to every realization of futurity, the resistance, internal to the social, to every structure or form."[11] Politics, as Edelman views it, always involves looking toward the future and toward a future good—toward a better arrangement of society. But the rupture of the human from its animality or the inhumanity of the human (what Edelman, following Freud, calls the death drive) inevitably thwarts the good in whatever form it takes.

In opposition to politics as it is traditionally conceived, Edelman proposes a queer politics of identification with the death drive. Rather than trying to achieve a better future, we should orient ourselves around that which ruptures us from our capacity for the good. The only possible ethical or political position for Edelman becomes one in which the inhumanity of the human plays the central part as the value that defines us. This would eliminate the marginalization of the figure of the queer since it is this figure that best embodies humanity's inhumanity or its rupture from animality. The queer turn away from a politics of the future good permits the emergence of an inhuman politics with a basis in rupture.

All this theoretical attention to rupture indicates that we have genuinely entered into the twenty-first century as a philosophical epoch. Philosophy in the twentieth century became a humiliated version of itself. From Gottlob Frege's attempt to reduce language to logic and Ludwig Wittgenstein's privileging of the language game to Jean-François Lyotard's pronouncement of the end of the grand philosophical narratives and Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of metaphysics, twentieth-century philosophy was nothing if not humble. The turn to rupture marks the abandonment of this humility. Hegel was the great philosopher of rupture because he did not back down from claims that he knew would ruffle the feathers of his contemporaries. Hegel's first significant philosophical work was an attempt to demonstrate the fundamental incompatibility—the rupture—between Fichte's and Schelling's systems.[12] Then, Hegel and Schelling broke because their competing conceptions of the absolute could not coexist. Such breaks are the lifeblood of philosophy. Rupture is as much a break from other thinkers as it is a break from nature or tradition. But this break requires the willingness to risk producing philosophical enemies, and this is precisely the risk that the thinkers discussed above have run.[13]

The task of philosophy (and especially political philosophy), as we see it, is identifying how values emerge. This is a task equal to philosophy's grandeur. But we remain completely Hegelian in our insistence that theory cannot act; it always comes on the scene too late. Or, as Hegel puts it in his famous statement at the end of the preface to *Philosophy of Right,* "The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of dusk."[14] What Hegel means here is not that philosophy is impotent and condemned to acts of interpretation but that at best it can pave the way for ruptures through its analysis of where things stand and of how rupture occurs. But the actual creation of value remains outside theory's province. Thought still requires the act, and the act requires a disaster.

The Saving Power of the Disaster

A natural disaster is never simply natural. This is not because human influences—like adding large amounts of carbon to the atmosphere—can precipitate a catastrophe in the natural world but because the natural order is not itself a harmonious order. All the instances of rupture that we

have chronicled in the book have involved the activity of speaking beings. In fact, our claim in the introduction is that the fundamental rupture, the structural rupture that repeats itself in various historical manifestations, is the emergence of the signifier itself. With this as a background, it seems strange, to say the least, to turn at the end to the natural disaster. But the natural disaster is, in a sense, what makes possible the emergence of the signifier. It is a more foundational rupture than that of signification itself.

In the case of the natural disaster, nature's rupture from itself becomes evident. If the natural world were perfectly in balance, there would be no natural disasters, and there would be no speaking beings. The very fact that someone once began to speak testifies to an imbalance in the natural world that created the ontological space for significance. The natural disaster offers the opportunity to return to rupture, provided that we approach it as a rupture rather than as a temporary distortion that we might contain or even master. The disaster does not occur once and then conclude. We live constantly in the shadow of the disaster. This means that we also live constantly in the rupture of the natural world from itself. By looking at a recent disaster, we can see how the values that contemporary theory has associated with rupture have emerged because those involved have treated the disaster as a form of rupture.

On January 12, 2010, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck Haiti, killing more than two hundred thousand people. As accounts and images of the devastation began to be reported, the level of destruction and desolation was unmistakable: schools, hospitals, and even the parliament building in Port-au-Prince lay in shambles; homes were pitched into ravines; bodies remained trapped beneath collapsed buildings or lay alongside them on cleaved sidewalks; people, shocked and bewildered, were forced to sleep (to borrow a phrase from media reports) in the open—either because they had no home to which to return or because they were afraid to enter a building of any sort. A natural disaster of this magnitude reminds us, of course, of nature's indifference to human aspirations and social distinctions. Reduced to rubble in Haiti were shanties and palaces alike, prisons and halls of justice. Confronted by such images of devastation—or the images from other recent natural disasters: the earthquake in Iran (2003), the Asian tsunami (2004), Hurricane Katrina (2005), the South China floods (2008), and the floods in Pakistan (2010)—we meet with a nonsensical rupture that cuts right through the fiction that social privilege and the pleasures of life are in any sense naturally or meaningfully ordained, or that the political meanings that govern social relations have been settled once and for all.[15] In the immediate aftermath of the natural disaster, we live in the fleeting interval in which we all are summoned into

the rupture. The politics we have linked to rupture in the preceding pages of this book belongs to this summons.

What is it that we are confronted by in this interval bequeathed to us by rupture? Faced with nature's own disequilibrium, we can glimpse anew the very crack in nature that is constitutive of the emergence of sociality. As we have said in the previous pages, this crack in nature is in some fundamental way its own cause. This is not to say that natural disasters do not have causes, or that human beings may not have a hand in these causes. It is to say instead that when we rush to these natural or human causes, we deny the rupture heralded by the natural disaster its proper ontological status. In the case of the earthquake in Haiti, for example, the claim that such quakes are a symptom of global warming or a sign of divine punishment are homologous at the level of their form. To these claims, we should prefer the completely neutral, descriptive findings of the scientists: that the quake was caused by a heretofore unknown fault line. When we speed quickly to the human (or humanly interpreted) causes and effects of the disaster, we let the rupture of the disaster fortify extant political talking points. In this way, disasters become merely occasions to repeat and refine the stale and familiar interpretive disputes that pass for politics these days.

A glimpse of this can be seen in the response to the August 2010 floods in Pakistan, where the needs of more than twenty million hungry and homeless Pakistanis were placed willy-nilly into the discourse of the War on Terror. Helping desperate flood victims would, it was said, help to win the battle for the hearts and minds of ordinary Pakistanis.[16] What this response distills is the capacity of the friend/enemy distinction to color every single aspect of human behavior. The rupture of the disaster gets swallowed up by the civilizational clash, when its real significance resides elsewhere. In the opening created by rupture, we see not the clash of cultures or the competing truth claims of this or that particular identity group. No, instead of the clash of civilizations, we see what Freud spoke of as "the principal task of civilization, its actual *raison d'être.*"[17] This task finds prominence in the solidarity we witness with the rupturing disaster. As Freud writes, "One of the few gratifying and exalting impressions which mankind can offer is when, in the face of an elemental catastrophe, it forgets the discordancies of its civilization and all its internal difficulties and animosities, and recalls the great common task of preserving itself against the superior power of nature."[18] Freud, perhaps *the* great thinker of antagonism, imagines disaster not as a panacea but at least as one moment in which it becomes possible to coexist amid the irreconcilable antagonism that defines us as subjects.

In *The Shock Doctrine,* Naomi Klein charts the rise of what she calls disaster capitalism—that is, "orchestrated raids on the public sphere in the wake of catastrophic events, combined with the treatment of disasters as existing market opportunities."[19] For the Friedmanite apostles of the free market, as Klein shows, nothing is placed up for grabs by the disaster. The disaster is, rather, an opportunity to apply the template of privatization to that which could not be privatized without the traumatic disruption of the disaster. What Klein lets us see is that a calamitous natural event, for disaster capitalists, is that by which no new values or ways of being should emerge. The kind of human togetherness that is unmistakable in the interval of the rupture is unthinkable when the value of commerce and profit is so entrenched, awaiting the disaster for its deployment. *The Shock Doctrine* makes it obvious that the possibilities we have sketched in this book (via the structuring concept and event of rupture) most certainly do not always or automatically lead to new and necessarily widespread egalitarian outcomes. Indeed, if we take these terms seriously, the quotients of freedom and potential afforded us by the disaster can lead to a strengthened conservative politics or a deepening of inequality.

Frequently the outcome is mixed, which is to say (as we said in chapter 3) that there is no time limit on rupture: its capacity for catalyzing political action can extend infinitely. One prime example here is no doubt Hurricane Katrina, whose horrible four-day duration left the citizens of a U.S. city more or less bereft of any of the resources necessary to live as human beings. In his powerful *City of Refuge,* Tom Piazza refers to these four days as an "endless stretch of ruptured time" in which the absence of any "coordinated authority" announces the fundamental breakdown of a narrative that promises to safeguard the dignity of those belonging to a national political community.[20] As horrible as this duration of ruptured time was, it nonetheless confronted the citizens of the United States and its powerful elected and corporate officials with the question of value, and with the chance to choose again one's political beliefs or to elect to take up action. As Spike Lee's *If God Is Willing and Da Creek Don't Rise* (2010) illustrates, five years after Katrina the powerful have exercised and acted on their beliefs, deepening New Orleans's racial and economic inequalities. Profiting on the disaster, the powerful deny its rupture.

At the close of *The Shock Doctrine,* however, Klein describes some direct action taken by New Orleans's residents to take back their neighborhoods. This action was inspired by a remarkable visit made by Katrina survivors to Thailand, where, hosted by tsunami survivors, they toured areas of devastation now basically rebuilt. Buoyed by what they saw, the New Orleans residents returned to the city, constituting something

akin to a "local people's renewal movement." Klein writes that these men and women "see themselves as mere repair people, taking what's there and fixing it, reinforcing it, making it better and more equal." She then adds—in the book's final line—"Most of all, they are building in resilience—for when the next shock hits."[21] Informing these movements is the recognition that civilization itself shares the world in its attempt to guard against, survive, and rebuild in the aftermath of the natural disaster. It is the rupture of the disaster that lets us glimpse—and act on the basis of—a notion of equality. This is what Badiou means when he says that "political equality is not what we want or plan, it is what we declare under fire of the event, here and now, as what is, and not what as should be."[22] When the political is made proximate to rupture, a new kind of distinction can come to inform our notions of the political—with heretofore unimaginable consequences and outcomes. When the next shock hits, it can hit a community of political equals.

Instead of friend/enemy, a version of human solidarity emerges that vaporizes notions of difference rooted in culture or region or language. All the political values we have discussed here arise through the disaster's rupture: belief in the possibility located where authority's hand cannot extend; universality of the disaster itself; solidarity in the face of untold destruction; equality within the destruction; freedom to start the social order anew; the risk of lives to save beings valued for their singularity; and the inhumanity of the survivors who choose to go on amid horrific suffering. We can relate to the destructive power of the natural world as itself a rupture, or we can use it as an occasion for trying to maintain the social distinctions founded on rupture's repression.

Within the rupture of the natural disaster, the only distinction left is the one between civilization as such and the unfathomable power of the natural world. In the end, *this* is the principal antagonism, not the civilizational one invoked by conservatives and not the multiculturalist ones of the secular liberal democracy. We saw something like this in the inspirational example of solidarity demonstrated by the Dominican Republic after the earthquake in Haiti, when Dominican Republic president Leonel Fernández virtually suspended the border between the two countries. This act enabled Haitians to come to hospitals in Santo Domingo and for supplies (penicillin, canned food, toilet paper, shoes, baby food, etc.) to be collected in the Dominican Republic and transported to Haiti. Haitian president René Préval was no doubt correct to describe the scenes of suffering in Haiti as unimaginable, but equally unimaginable were the scenes of Dominicans bringing relief supplies to collection centers all over the country for transport into Haiti, and indeed, images of President Fernán-

dez's visiting Haiti in the days after the earthquake—the first visit by a head of state after the disaster. All government flags flew at half-mast the weekend after the earthquake, and President Fernández declared two days of national mourning for those killed in Haiti. Clearly, in the wake of a nonsensical rupture, something new was being introduced into the (political) relationship between the two peoples, shaking up the ossified hatred and distrust that has long dominated the clash between the two countries.

That the catalysts for this hatred and distrust have been the biracial, Spanish-speaking Dominicans makes their response to the earthquake all the more remarkable. Despite Haitian help in freeing Dominicans from Spanish rule—it was Haiti that, in 1821, helped Dominicans win independence from Spain, and Haiti helped the Dominican Republic regain this independence in 1865 after it had again fallen under Spanish rule—a long history of violence has marked the relationship between the two countries. At the heart of this violence is the stain of white supremacist beliefs, the persistent belief that the Dominican Republic needed saving from the influx of dark-skinned, French-speaking Haitians, who worked as actual and virtual slaves in the sugar fields.

The event that horribly crystallizes this violence, of course, occurred in October 1937, when Dominican dictator General Rafael Trujillo ordered an act of ethnic cleansing that resulted in the mass murder of more than twenty thousand Haitians for reasons having to do with race and cultural difference. Inspired by Hitler, whose delegates he hosted in September 1937, receiving from them a copy of *Mein Kampf,* Trujillo instructed his men to hold up sprigs of parsley and to ask anyone with dark skin to identify the plant. Anyone who could not pronounce the word *perejil* without the trilled *r* was killed with a machete. Machetes were used so that Trujillo could later claim that the massacre was the self-defensive work of peasants. In subsequent years, the massacre was indeed described as legitimately defensive.[23] In the wake of the Haitian earthquake, however, which swayed even the new high-rise apartment buildings in Santo Domingo, this idea of a national identity or border worth defending was suspended.[24]

We will never live in a world without borders. But the natural disaster reminds us that the fundamental border is not that between nations or ethnic groups but exists within the natural world itself. What is (or ought to be) confirmed by the different sounds of the Other's language or of the way he or she speaks our own is not the Other's belonging to a different (and hated) community but rather the distinct and shared human capacity to hear a sound as sound. It is out of a natural disaster that a speaking

humanity (or a speaking inhumanity) emerged—out of nature's split with itself—and for this reason we can entertain no hope of returning to any sort of harmony, be it natural or technological. This is why dystopia is always more compelling than utopia. We can return only to the disaster of our emergence in order to affirm the ultimate priority of rupture and the values that it bequeaths. Disaster occasions responses like the Dominican Republic's response to Haiti because it highlights the values that social structure itself is intent on repressing. There is no salvation; there is only disaster. But in disaster lies the possibility of reasserting the values that would make our existence endurable.

NOTES

Introduction

1. The allusion here, of course, is to Alexandre Koyré's account of the scientific revolution that surrounded the shift from geocentrism to heliocentrism, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957).

2. Jacques Lacan provides a nice example of the typical role that power plays relative to rupture, which he formulates in terms of the outbreak of desire (though he would later associate it with drive or enjoyment). In his seminar on the ethics of psychoanalysis, he notes, "What is Alexander's proclamation when he arrived in Persepolis or Hitler's when he arrived in Paris? The preamble isn't important: 'I have come to liberate you from this or that.' The essential point is 'Carry on working. Work must go on.' Which of course, means: 'Let it be clear to everyone that this is on no account the moment to express the least surge of desire.' The morality of power, of the service of goods, is as follows: 'As far as desires are concerned, come back later. Make them wait.' " Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960,* trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1992), 315.

3. The fetishization of resistance has become commonplace today, but perhaps the great exemplar of this position was Albert Camus, who wrote *The Rebel* in order to encourage continual revolt without revolution. Revolution, for Camus, marks the betrayal of revolt, and revolt is the act through which our humanity becomes constituted. The problem with revolution, as Camus sees it, is that it always ends up with the establishment of power, which is exactly what continual revolt avoids. What Camus doesn't see is how the position of revolt requires the very power structure that it contests. The subject of revolt cannot but be what Hegel calls a beautiful soul, a subject who fails to see its own role in constituting and sustaining the situation that it rails against. For Camus's explanation of the politics of revolt, see Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt,* trans. Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage, 1991).

4. Derrida's deconstruction of traditional metaphysics sees only a repression of rupture in metaphysical speculation. The attempt to achieve presence, as he sees it, has the effect of eliding difference and discontinuity. But this analysis misses how metaphysics first introduces a rupture into being before it theorizes a return to presence. According to Derrida, "Metaphysics has always consisted in attempting to uproot the presence of meaning, in whatever guise, from *différance*" (Jacques Derrida, *Positions,* trans. Alan Bass [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981], 32). Our contention is exactly the opposite: metaphysics

introduces difference into being in the form of the break between the appearance and the idea.

5. Metaphysics tries to heal the rupture that it opens by seeking an ultimate ground for being, and this is why Christian theology was so easily able to take up the metaphysical tradition. God becomes the foundation for being and thereby heals the rupture occasioned by metaphysical speculation.

6. Attempts to overcome the epistemological division between appearances and things in themselves—to treat things in themselves as if they are appearances and thereby governed by the laws of the understanding—result in the antinomies of pure reason. Kant shows how through these antinomies reason becomes at odds with itself unless it retains this fundamental division. Kant makes clear that a certain idea of rupture is necessary for thinking coherently about the world.

7. Our position on Hegel is exactly the opposite of Allen Wood's, who defends Hegel as an ethical and political thinker by dismissing his "speculative metaphysics." According to Wood, "If you decide to examine [Hegel's metaphysical speculation] more closely, you know before long that you are in for a difficult and generally unrewarding time of it, at least from the standpoint of social and political theory. If you are sensible, you will try to avoid that" (Allen W. Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990], xiii). Though Hegel's political thought is not barren of insight, our view is that the metaphysical ground is, contra Wood, much more fecund because it takes rupture as its point of departure, while the political thought assigns it a much more minimal role.

8. There have been, of course, many attempts to redeem Hegel as a political thinker, but the most prominent of these have focused on the promise of reconciliation and the overcoming of rupture that his thought seems to offer. According to Herbert Marcuse's version, Hegel privileges the state precisely because it can overcome and reconcile the rupture introduced by civil society. Marcuse notes, "The task of the state, or of any adequate political organization, is to see to it that the contradictions inherent in the economic structure do not destroy the whole system. The state must assume the function of bridling the anarchic social and economic process." Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory,* 2nd ed. (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1983), 60.

9. The first to make the connection between Agamben's conception of gesture and Žižek's version of the death drive was Hilary Neroni. For Neroni, gesture, as the point of nonlanguage within language, is one of the ways that the death drive manifests itself. See her unpublished paper "The Bare Life Fantasy: Agamben, Jack Bauer, and the Imperative to Torture," Annual Conference of the Association for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society, Rutgers University, New Jersey, October 25, 2008.

10. Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II,* trans. Alberto Toscano (New York: Continuum, 2009), 9.

11. Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism,* trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 63.

12. In his book on Deleuze, Badiou argues for the primacy of truth over time, insisting that "the actuality of truths (be these, for instance, scientific, political, amorous, or artistic) is transtemporal" (Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being,* trans. Louise Burchill [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000], 64). For Badiou, the real experience of political revolutions requires "the forgetting of time itself: the moment when we live as if time (*this* time) had never existed, or, in conformity with the profound maxim of Aristotle, as if we were immortal. . . . It is in this abolition of time that is engendered the eternity of truths" (64–65).

13. Badiou, *Logics of Worlds,* 86.

14. Giorgio Agamben, *Means without End: Notes on Politics,* trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 60.

15. Smith and Carlos paid a steep price for their gesture, and this price testifies to its political bearing. They both received a great deal of criticism, suffered from death threats, and had numerous athletic opportunities denied to them, though Smith did go on to become a professional football player with the Cincinnati Bengals.

16. Something identical transpires in the language of Holocaust testimony, which confronts us with the nonlanguage—the uncertain or meaningless word qua sound—that our everyday language bears deep within it. What Agamben finds so exemplary in the career of Primo Levi is the latter's attempt to discern, to listen to, and to reflect on the nature of language as nonlanguage, as pure means. See, in this context, Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive,* trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 15–39.

17. The death drive's insistence on enjoyment is not the ultimate form of pathological narcissism. As Žižek understands it, enjoyment is not the subject's private experience of plenitude but an inevitably public experience of lack and absence. The subject enjoys its loss through the death drive, and this enjoyment involves the subject in the public world where loss occurs. The pathological narcissist's retreat into privacy is simultaneously a retreat from the enjoyment found in the death drive.

18. Catherine Malabou, *Les nouveaux blessés: De Freud à la neurologie, penser les traumatismes contemporains* (Paris: Bayard, 2007), 344.

19. In *Symbolic Economies,* Jean-Joseph Goux sees rupture or what he calls substitution as the act that creates value, but Goux never follows through on the implications of this insight. Rather than recognize rupture as a genuinely creative act, his tendency is to criticize it as ideological. He writes, "Metaphors, symptoms, signs, representations: it is always through replacement that values are created. Replacing what is forbidden, what is lacking, what is hidden or lost, what is damaged, in short, replacing with something equivalent what is not itself, in person, presentable: such, indeed, is the scene, and such are the interminable dealings, mobile or immobile, which are plotted upon it. Now the notion of value, whether for exchange, compensation, indemification, purchasing, or repurchasing, is implied in every replacement" (Jean-Joesph Goux, *Symbolic Economies: After Marx and Freud,* trans. Jennifer Curtiss Gage [Ithaca:

Cornell University Press, 1990], 9). One can recognize in Goux's description of rupture a sense that it necessarily hides something absent or lacking, which is why it is ideological at the same time as creative. According to Goux, the model for this version of rupture is the formation of the general equivalent or money. He criticizes rupture insofar as it remains primarily an economic phenomenon, even if economy is isomorphic with other arenas, like the psyche and signification.

20. Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire, livre V: Les formations de l'inconscient, 1957–1958,* ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1998), 218.

21. Evolutionary biologists attempt to conceive of the appeal of unnecessary or harmful objects in terms of need rather than in terms of desire. The urge to eat chocolate cake—or any fatty substance—stems from a prehistoric need for fat in times of want; eating fat increased chances of survivability and benefited the evolution of the species. This type of reduction of desire to need requires denying that the subject can genuinely act against its interest and, in doing so, fails to acknowledge the disruptive effect of the signifying rupture on the human body. In addition, the argument itself is fallacious since it begins with the result and fails to reckon with other possible causes that might produce this result. The evolutionary biologists who link the eating of chocolate cake to a prehistoric need for fat are guilty of the fallacy of affirming the consequent or drawing a specific conclusion from facts that might equally support an entirely different one.

22. Lacan makes clear the corresponding links between the signifier and rupture and between the signified and continuity. He notes that in "the flow of the signified . . . the continuity of what is lived presents itself." Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire, livre IV: La relation d'objet, 1956–1957,* ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1994), 47.

23. The critique of the signifier advanced by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari mistakes the structure of the signified for that of the signifier. They do not see the disruptiveness of the signifier's emergence that the apparently stable structure of meaning obscures, which is why they claim, "There is only one thing that can be said about the signifier: it is Redundancy, it is the Redundant. Hence its incredible despotism, and its success." Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 66.

24. In his seminar on the logic of fantasy, Lacan claims, "The subject begins with the cut." Jacques Lacan, "Le séminaire, livre XIV: La logique du fantasme, 1966–1967," unpublished manuscript, session of November 16, 1966.

25. In order to indicate the priority of the signifier relative to the signified, Lacan inverts Saussure's diagram depicting their relationship. Whereas Saussure places the signified on top of a dividing bar and the signifier beneath, Lacan switches the positions.

26. The slip of the tongue marks one way that rupture manifests itself in everyday life, which is predominantly via its repression. We pay attention to slips and credit them with revealing a hidden truth because they indicate the momentary return to the origin of subjectivity itself. Within the slip of the tongue, the subject becomes visible in its singular emergence, and this counts more than all the conscious meaning that the subject attempts to disseminate concerning itself.

27. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999), 83.

28. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto: A Modern Edition,* trans. Samuel Moore (New York: Verso, 1998), 38–39.

29. Eric Santner describes this movement of excess from a position of transcendence—its association with the king—to one of immanence—its association with the people. In *The Royal Remains,* he claims, "The complex symbolic structures and dynamics that inform medieval and early modern European monarchies do not simply disappear from the space of politics once the body of the king is no longer available as the singular embodiment of the principle and functions of sovereignty; rather, these structures and dynamics migrate into a new location" (Eric Santner, *The Royal Remains: The People's Two Bodies and the Endgames of Sovereignty* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012], 245). The sacred excess of the king becomes, in Santner's reading, an excess that haunts the people themselves. They carry the burden of what remains of royalty. For another account of the crisis caused by this transition, see Santner's earlier *My Own Private Germany: Daniel Paul Schreber's Secret History of Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

30. Even the political economists who initially theorize and defend the capitalist system recognize that labor is the source of value. As Adam Smith points out, "Labour . . . is alone the ultimate and real standard by which the value of all commodities can at all times and places be estimated and compared. It is their real price; money is their nominal price only." Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Hamburg: Management Laboratory Press, 2008), 35.

31. When Marx describes the creation of surplus value, he emphasizes the miraculous nature of the process. He says, "During the second period of the labour process, that in which his labour is no longer necessary labour, the worker does indeed expend labour-power, he does work, but his labour is no longer necessary labour, and he creates no value for himself. He creates surplus-value which, for the capitalist, has all the charms of something created out of nothing." Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One,* trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1976), 325.

32. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume Three,* trans. David Fernbach (New York: Penguin, 1981), 139.

33. In *Number and Numbers,* Alain Badiou claims that he elaborates a theory of number not in order to understand the nature of value but in order to make clear exactly what value *isn't.* As long as we remain on the terrain of the number, we miss the subject. See Alain Badiou, *Number and Numbers,* trans. Robin Mackay (Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2008).

34. Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political,* trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 28.

35. One could argue that the rupture theorized by the conservative transforms the Leftist version of the cut by turning a temporal event into a spatial division. In the standard Marxist critique of reification (as worked out by Georg

Lukács), this spatialization of time characterizes bourgeois thought. But such a critique lets contemporary theory off the hook much too easily. The rupture is not simply a momentary or temporal cut in existing structures but also a vehicle for creating distinctions between those who are faithful to it and those who are not. It is spatial as well as temporal, which the conservatives recognize. Thus, the distinction between the Leftist version of rupture and the conservative one must lie elsewhere.

36. Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008), 210.

37. Heidegger's philosophical rejection of the category of the subject is an explicit renunciation of rupture along with metaphysics. The subject, for Heidegger, has a wholly illusory existence outside its concrete temporality, which is why Heidegger will employ the term only derisively. Heidegger's hostility to the subject manifests itself not only in the use of the term "Dasein" instead of "subject" in *Being and Time,* but also in his famous *Kehre,* or "turning," in the mid-1930s. In this turning away from his earlier thought, Heidegger implicitly criticizes himself not for abandoning the subject but for orienting his thought too much around subjectivity. Taking Dasein as a point of departure was, he comes to believe, a way of smuggling the subject into his early philosophy. In his later thought, the question of Being becomes the new point of departure, and the existential analytic of Dasein drops out completely. Rather than a recovery of a more original ontology, this transformation punctuates and ensures the repression of rupture. It is not, as some would claim, a refutation of his Nazi engagement but a continuation of the conservative politics of this engagement by other means.

38. Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology,* trans. Dorion Cairns (Boston: Kluwer, 1991), 84.

39. Lévi-Strauss describes the moment at which nature becomes culture in terms that resemble those we use to explain rupture. He says, "The prohibition of incest is where nature transcends itself. . . . It brings about and is in itself the advent of a new order." Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship,* trans. James Harle Bell, John Richard von Sturmer, and Rodney Needham (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 25.

40. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 35.

41. Carnap's hope is to eliminate speculation altogether and "*to substitute logical syntax for philosophy.*" Rudolf Carnap, *The Logical Syntax of Language,* trans. Amethe Smeaton (Chicago: Open Court, 2002), 8.

42. For an explanation of the relationship between time and the subject, see Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness,* trans. F. L. Pogson (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 2001).

43. Friedrich Nietzsche shares many of the vitalist proclivities of Bergson and Deleuze (and he, along with Bergson and Spinoza, is one of the primary influences on Deleuze). But Nietzsche also thinks against vitalism and conceives a version of rupture. Ironically, rupture manifests itself in Nietzsche's thought in the form of the eternal return. Though the eternal return eliminates the importance of change—if everything returns eternally then revolutionary change doesn't really matter—it does enable one to break from everyday experience and take up a different relationship to the everyday, which is why Nietzsche values it. When Nietzsche conceives the eternal return, he understands it as a terrible form of freedom that entails a violent separation. It is for this reason that the eternal return is the one part of Nietzsche's philosophy that Deleuze must radically deform in his book on Nietzsche. As Deleuze sees it, the point is not that everything returns but that only what merits returning ends up doing so. The result is that the eternal return loses its capacity for lifting the subject out of its situation by introducing a domain in which situational changes cease to matter. For an explanation of the philosophical contradictions inherent in Deleuze's rereading of Nietzsche's eternal return, see Alenka Zupančič, *The Odd One In: On Comedy* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2008), 159–60.

44. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image,* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

45. Kant is the first thinker to associate subjectivity with evil. Even though he envisions a subject capable of lifting itself out of its world by giving itself the moral law, the starting point of the subject is its radical evil, which is its proclivity for doing good for the wrong reasons. The subject adopts the moral law against the background of this radical evil.

46. Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza,* trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 249.

47. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments,* trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002),

48. Theodor Adorno's rocky relationship with political activists is one mark of the Frankfurt School's turn away from rupture. In the face of practical political activists, Adorno continued to insist on his belief in an ultimate rupture, but he could imagine no form of accomplishing it that would ever be adequate to the idea. Rupture had to remain imaginary for Adorno to adhere to it.

49. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), 404–5.

50. Adorno's virulent attack on Heidegger and existentialism, *The Jargon of Authenticity,* takes to task a particular form of authenticity. Though many of Adorno's criticisms are undoubtedly accurate, one gets the sense that it is authenticity as such that is the target as much as existentialism as a philosophy. See Theodor W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity,* trans. Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will (New York: Routledge, 2003).

51. Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," trans. Harry Zohn, in *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938–1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 395.

52. Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," trans. Edmund Jephcott, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1: 1913–1926* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 249–50.

53. In her relatively late work *On Violence,* Arendt attacks the contemporary apotheosis of violence as a symptom of the evanescence of power. She associ-

ates violence with the tyranny of the individual and power with the assertion of a collective spirit. Despite her friendship with Benjamin, she seems here not to consider the possibility of his notion of divine violence. For Arendt, we must attack the espousal of violence because it assists in the reduction of subjects to their biological being, which for her always represents the great danger. See Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1969).

54. In her biographical account of Benjamin, Arendt stresses his well-known love of quotations, which she links not to continuity but to rupture. She says, "For Benjamin to quote is to name, and naming rather than speaking, the word rather than the sentence, brings truth to light" (Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* [San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1968], 203). Benjamin privileges the naming act inherent in the quotation because it rips the words out of the sedimented tradition in which their truth disappears. The quotation marks a violent break in progressive history.

55. Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 13.

56. Arendt's emphasis on natality represents the weak point in her theory of rupture. By grounding rupture in natality rather than in the fracture of being itself, she runs into a dramatic contradiction. Birth is a natural and biological fact, and yet Arendt wants the fact of birth to do the heavy lifting in her theory of the human rupture from the biological world.

57. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 198.

58. In *The Century,* Alain Badiou notices what he calls a passion for the real that dominates the twentieth century. He claims, "What fascinated the militants of the twentieth century was the real. In this century there is a veritable exaltation of the real, even in its horror" (Alain Badiou, *The Century,* trans. Alberto Toscano [Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2007], 19). This passion for the real would seem to coincide with a passion for rupture since rupture is the real interruption of a symbolic structure. But twentieth-century thought most often figures the real as a specific context or place, which is what rupture interrupts.

59. *The Dhammapada,* trans. Gil Fronsdal (Boston: Shambhala, 2006), 1.

60. Lao-tzu, *Tao Te Ching,* trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), 64.

61. Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity,* trans. George Eliot (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1989).

62. See on this Philip Roth's encomium to circumcision in the final pages of *The Counterlife:* "I know that touting circumcision is entirely anti-Lamaze and the thinking these days that wants to debrutalize birth and culminates in delivering the child in water in order not even to startle him. Circumcision is startling, all right, particularly when performed by a garlicked old man upon the glory of a newborn body, but then maybe that's what the Jews had in mind and what makes the act seem quintessentially Jewish and the mark of their reality. . . . Circumcision is everything that the pastoral is not and, to my mind, reinforces what the world is about, which isn't strifeless unity. Quite convincingly, circumcision gives the lie to the womb-dream of life in the beautiful state of innocent prehistory, the appealing idyll of living 'naturally,' unencumbered by man-made ritual. To be born is to lose all that." Philip Roth, *The Counterlife* (New York: Random House, 1986), 323.

63. Plato's much-criticized denigration of the body stems from his failure to locate universality in rupture and his proclivity for identifying it with the ideal. It is this failure that leads Plato to claim, "If we are ever to have pure knowledge, we must escape from the body and observe things in themselves with the soul by itself." Plato, *Phaedo,* trans. G. M. A. Grube, in *Plato: Complete Works,* ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 58

64. The Gospel accounts emphasize the outcast status of Christ's followers in order to make clear that the solidarity that forms around him exists in contrast to the bond created by legal entities. The Gospel of Luke takes this furthest. The Luke version recounts Christ's penultimate statement as the embrace of the criminal hanging next to him, to whom Christ offers assurance that he would join Christ in paradise. Christian solidarity explicitly includes the criminal element that the community formed by the law cannot incorporate except through an exclusion.

65. It is only when Christianity abandons Christ's commitment to rupture and constitutes itself as a law that it becomes what Nietzsche calls a slave morality. The Christianity of the rupture builds solidarity through the refusal of power—a radical indifference to power that Nietzsche would celebrate—rather than by assuming using morality in order to amass it. Though Nietzsche is a philosopher who celebrates power, he prefers the power of self-overcoming to that of political domination, though here his thought is not always consistent.

66. Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics,* trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992), 182.

67. That politically utopian alternatives to the present end up confronting us with a barbarism worse than that of the society being opposed is a virtual *doxa* today. A paradigmatic staging of this *doxa* exists in Salman Rushdie's *Fury* (2000)—a novel that eerily anticipates the September 11 attack on the United States. On the one hand, Rushdie executes an unparalleled, "furious" novelistic critique of the barbarism of global capitalism and the spectacle of commodity culture. On the other, however, when Rushdie tries to imagine an opposition to the regime of global capitalism, he can do so only from the standpoint of caricature, naming the site of revolution Lilliput-Blefuscu and making revolutionary violence even more barbaric than the violent system it is meant to highlight and oppose.

68. Fabio Vighi, *On Žižek's Dialectics: Surplus, Subtraction, Sublimation* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 111.

Chapter One

1. Asked in 1999 about the link between his Christian faith and his political identity, Al Gore averred that "faith is the center of my life. I don't wear it on my sleeve, but I'm happy to respond to your question affirming my faith." Peter Steinfels, "Beliefs: In a Wide Ranging Talk, Al Gore Reveals the Evangelical and Intellectual Roots of His Faith," *New York Times,* May 29, 1999, http://

www.nytimes.com/1999/05/29/us/beliefs-wide-ranging-talk-al-gore-reveals-evangelical-intellectual-roots-his.html.

2. James Madison, *The Writings of James Madison, Volume V, 1787–1790,* ed. Gaillard Hunt (New York: Putnam's, 1904), 132.

3. Tony Judt, quoted in Christina Smallwood, "Talking with Tony Judt," *The Nation,* May 17, 2010, 19.

4. Tony Judt, *Ill Fares the Land* (New York: Penguin, 2010), 179.

5. Ibid., 180.

6. Ibid., 183. Judt articulates a version of George Lakoff's argument that the Left needs to frame the political debate in the kind of clear moral terms used by conservatives, though their terms would be opposed. Lakoff contends, "As long as liberals ignore the moral, mythic, and emotional dimension of politics, as long as they stick to policy and interest groups and issue-by-issue debate, they will have no hope of understanding the nature of the political transformation that has overtaken this country and they will have no hope of changing it" (George Lakoff, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think,* 2nd ed. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002], 19). The problem with Lakoff's claim here is not that reframing the issue in their own moral terms wouldn't aid the Left to some extent but that he fails to see the role that enjoyment plays in the moral terms that one adopts. The terms that conservatives mobilize—family, nation, religion—have a powerful political effect because they use them to access the way that subjects enjoy. Moral terms used by the Left would not necessarily have the same effect.

7. Alenka Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan* (New York: Verso, 2000), 55.

8. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 649.

9. The crucial case here is *Lee v. Weisman* (1992), in which the Supreme Court held that religious prayers offered at graduation—even if nonsectarian and nonproselytizing—violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. This decision is echoed in the forbidding of student-led prayers at sporting events in *Jane Doe v. Sante Fe Independent School District* (1999) decided by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit. Both affirm a political legacy that goes at least as far back as America's independence.

10. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1958), 11.

11. Bush is reported to have said this on a campaign stop in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in July 2004.

12. The November 2009 constitutional referendum in Switzerland banning minarets (an architectural structure rather than a form of action) reveals the lengths to which a liberal democratic society will go to protect its tolerance-enshrining law against any perceived threat. By defining the minaret as the incarnation of Sharia and the harbinger of its implementation, proponents of the referendum were successful at getting a majority to vote according to their liberal-democratic commitments.

13. See Victor J. Stenger, *God: The Failed Hypothesis; How Science Shows That God Does Not Exist* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2007); Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Penguin, 2006); Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: Norton, 2004); Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2006); Michel Onfray, *Atheist Manifesto: The Case Against Christianity, Judaism, and Islam,* trans. Jeremy Leggatt (New York: Arcade, 2007); Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve Books, 2007).

14. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: How to Become What You Are,* in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings,* ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 151. Ironically, Nietzsche's contempt for believers—a contempt every bit as pungent as that of Richard Dawkins—had a homology in his contempt for Darwinism, a philosophy of leveling just as pernicious, in Nietzsche's view, as Christianity. The distance between Nietzsche and Dawkins reflects the changed status of atheism today.

15. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 50.

16. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 65.

17. Deconstruction celebrates the creative, proliferative aspect of the absence of the definitive binary signifier. The differential relationship between signs and their signified represents a key contribution to nonoppressive political theory. But the very steps along the endless chain require an absence that is capable of structuring the field of signification. As Lacan writes, "It's thought that a great step forward has been made by saying that the signified only ever reaches its goal via another signified, through referring to another meaning. This is only the first step, and one fails to see that a second one is needed. It has to be realized that without structuring by the signifier no transference of sense would be possible." Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychoses, 1955–1956,* trans. Russell Grigg (New York: Norton, 1993), 224.

18. One way to understand the radicalism of what Alain Badiou calls an event might be considering the way the subject of an event does not engage in an agonized or prolonged exploration of that which might make the act of belief more rational or sensible. Shorn of such exploration, an event is thus something that confronts us with a missing signifier. For someone like Badiou, the properly political response to this missing signifier is belief. Today, however, it is far more common to see the proper political response as entailing its subversion, usually via some historical or imagined contextualization. The quintessential instance of such subversion is Kafka's parable of Abraham, in which we are confronted with an entirely ordinary individual who is incapable of performing the sacrifice or who understands God's demand as fundamentally absurd.

19. One of the virtues of Brechtian theater is its reminding spectators that *they* are the ones exercising a kind of belief in what is being staged.

20. The commodity appears as an ordinary object, and we can even take up a realist attitude toward it. But as producers and consumers within capitalism, we act in a way that demonstrates, according to Žižek, "the 'religious' metaphysi-

cal moment at work at the very heart of the most 'earthly' economic activity." Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (New York: Verso, 2010), 190.

21. As Alexandre Kojève puts it, "The *Ethics* explains everything, except the possibility, for a man living in time, to write it" (Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, ed. Raymond Queneau [Paris: Gallimard, 1947], 354).

22. It is here that we can see precisely the *kind* of reconciliation Hegel has in mind when he asserts that all representations of religion owe a debt to cognition. As Hegel never tires of repeating, "even when God is brought down to the level of representation, the content of this representation still belongs to the realm of thought" (G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 1, trans. R. F. Brown et al., ed. Peter C. Hodgson [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007], 208). This speaks directly, of course, to the most controversial aspect of Hegel's version of religion's history: the incarnation of God in the person of Christ, and the notion that Christ represents, in point of fact, God "in the flesh." Does Hegel take Christ's "sacrifice" to represent God's deepest love for its subjects? Is this not the height of anthropomorphism? For Hegel, however, the significance of Christ lies not in the *verifiable fact* that Christ is the "son of God." This is—like the story of humanity's fall out of some Edenic paradise—a mere myth. Far more significant, however, is the way the representation of Christ as the son of God *makes explicit* the conditions of possibility for religious belief and dramatizes the purely performative process whereby the being of God is invested with value. Thus for Hegel, the significance of this final mode of appearance of God is simply that it *repeats* what has already happened implicitly at the level of God's idea. This is why Hegel repeatedly scorns the attempt to secure external verification of Christ's divinity as a "spiritless mode of attestation" (G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 3, trans. R. F. Brown et al., ed. Peter C. Hodgson [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007], 221). The only thing capable of verifying the integrity of the object of religious belief is spirit itself. And it is also why Hegel draws consistent attention to the necessity of Christ's death for what it signifies. The appearance and death of Christ no longer conceals the violent act of self-creation that marks God's passage from being to existence. Viewed speculatively, in Christ's appearance and death, we no longer mystify the irrational, monstrous founding act—death, negation—that is part of God and the Logos itself. What the death of Christ signifies for us is thus not the harmonious reconciliation of the finite and infinite but rather a *repetition* of God's anguished self-diremption. When we bear witness to Christ's death in this way, we are thus far from healed; on the contrary, we understand that in a very radical sense, our nature and the divine nature are not different.

23. We like for the same reason Thomas Friedman's argument that we begin to use the phrase "global weirding" (instead of the no longer sufficiently nonsensical *global warming*) to describe the problem of climate change. See Thomas L. Friedman, "Global Weirding Is Here," *New York Times*, February 17, 2010, A23.

24. Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, in *Fear and Trembling / Repetition*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 53.

25. Kierkegaard's violent rejection of Hegel is also his implicit rejection of Christianity. What he cannot stomach is Hegel's—and Christianity's—insistence that the absent God becomes an absent presence in the form of Christ. Kierkegaard's Christ remains in the beyond with the Father. The Christian theologian belongs in the company of Maimonides rather than that of Aquinas.

26. Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Schocken Books, 1996), xx.

27. Gershom Scholem, ed., *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem, 1932–1940*, trans. Gary Smith and Andre Lefevere (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), 142.

28. Dan Berrett, "Feeling the Spirit of Prayer," *Newsweek*, September 5, 2005, 64.

29. Moses Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. Michael Friedlander (London: Routledge, 1904), 91.

30. According to Scholem, the Sabbatian movement gave rise to an entirely new "life-feeling"—one in which "in the minds of believers imminent redemption and realized redemption came to be confused" (Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, 688). And while Scholem wants to do justice to this movement—his goal is historical insight, not partisan critique—he conceives his investigation as a way of asking after the serious costs paid by the Jewish people for their "messianic idea," or, to put this in the words of Scholem's trenchant question, "What price messianism?" (xii).

31. Karmen MacKendrick, *Word Made Skin: Figuring Language at the Surface of Flesh* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004). MacKendrick finds in styles of prose and poetic language a kind of tactility that enables one to meet the flesh without mastering it—styles in which "the possibility of touch is there but not . . . the possibility of grasping" (3). For MacKendrick, when we see words as skin, we see language as not just an expressive or instrumental medium but rather how "word and flesh are with one another in a curious liminal relation of contact, implication, and incision, each in its own odd way a relation of desire and drawing, seduction and delight" (12).

32. See Melissa Raphael, *The Female Face in Auschwitz: A Jewish Feminist Theology of the Holocaust* (New York: Routledge, 2003). Raphael claims that God's female face enables us to recognize and articulate—in the "curvature of the maternal posture" discerned in memoirs written by female survivors of Auschwitz—the bases of a post-Holocaust, feminist theology. If for Raphael God's female face catalyzes a clear feminist project, the extent to which Kabbalistic texts themselves contain or advance a feminist politics remains a matter of critical debate. Elliot Wolfson, for instance, contends that while Kabbalistic texts, on their surface, revalue the feminine for Judaism, they reify the subordinate status of women and thus do not radically challenge—speculatively or practically—the patriarchal dimension of Judaism. Even if, speculatively, medieval Kabbalists conceive the unity and perfection of God in terms of the union of masculine and feminine, this union, for Wolfson, only and always constitutes a distinctly male androgyne. And practically, despite seeming adulatory depictions of Jewish women and mothers, medieval Kabbalists never even begin to approach an activist political sensibility. For Wolfson's investiga-

tion of this issue, see Elliot Wolfson, *Circle in the Square: Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 79–121, and his *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 46–110. Esther Benbassa and Jean-Christophe Attias have argued likewise that Kabbalistic conceptions of the feminine remain wedded to the subordinate status and denigration of women. They write, "Even God's androgyny does not imply any sort of symmetry or equivalence. . . . The fact remains that the androgynous Divinity is first and foremost masculine and that any reunification of the divine also ultimately implies subordination of the feminine to the masculine principle. . . . In the hoped-for union of the two principles, the Feminine is summoned to dissolve itself in the Masculine, to let itself be absorbed or neutralized by it" (Esther Benbassa and Jean-Christophe Attias, *The Jew and the Other,* trans. G. M. Goshgarian [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004], 20–21). For a work that stakes a woman's recovery of her "sacred Self" on the reclamation of "the Shekinah in her own body," see Perle Besserman, *A New Kabbalah for Women* (New York: Palgrave, 2005).

33. Kristeva's seminal argument regarding the revolutionary power of presymbolic modes of signification appears in Julia Kristeva, *Revolution and Poetic Language,* trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.

34. As Santner puts it, "The Jews are for Rosenzweig the people whose life is focused not on its *predicative being,* but rather on what remains in excess of, what persists beyond, the predicates that distinguish a historical people from other peoples. . . . Jewish difference and survival is linked not to any special talents or properties but rather to the enigma of election that opens on to an order of experience 'beyond the pleasure principle,' beyond the teleological strivings that constitute the historical life of nations" (Eric Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001], 112). Santner reads here Rosenzweig's project as uncovering in biblical revelation and redemption something beyond all predication—a nonsymbolizable excess or surplus that exists (or insists) *in us* as the "void of our character," as something meaningless yet valid, and this is what makes Jewishness, for Rosenzweig, tautological.

35. His insistence on the fundamentally mysterious bases of religious faith makes Kierkegaard the most explicit preserver of freedom in Christian theology. What Kierkegaard advocates as the inwardness of the religious believer is really that believer's radically elective act in the face of anxiety. As Kierkegaard contends, "Anxiety is freedom's actuality as the possibility of possibility." Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation of the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin,* trans. Reidar Thomte (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 42.

36. The figure closest to the form of revelation discussed here is no doubt Emmanuel Levinas, for whom revelation appears likewise not as a meaningful content but rather as the irreducible face. And yet for Levinas, revelation (in the form of the Other's face) is *already* ethical, already bears within it a demand

and an obligation to meet and care for something naked, destitute, and indigent that one is not free to reject. As Judith Butler's recent discussion of Levinas in the context of U.S. post–September 11 political and military practices makes plain, the face has a kind of precariousness about it that can check free, unchecked, and unilateral exercises of power and domination. Levinas views the Other's face as the ethical brake on the subject's freedom. From the perspective of Kabbalistic revelation, however, the encounter with that which is divinely Other does not so much curtail human freedom as condition and enable its radical exercise.

37. Myla Goldberg, *Bee Season: A Novel* (New York: Anchor, 2001), 30.

38. Ibid., 12, 30.

39. Martin Jay, *Refractions of Violence* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 178.

40. Ibid., 178.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., 182.

43. In both *The Scapegoat* and *Job: The Victim of His People,* Girard enjoins us to recognize the actual victim punished or killed in the name of some knowledge whose status is never questioned. Such knowledge, he contends, warrants the designation of myth.

44. There are too many examples to mention of perpetrators justifying their violence by resorting to God. In any case, we'll name two—first, Yigal Amir's claim that God was his accomplice in the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin and, second, Sheikh Ibrahim Madhi's contention that the Koran is clear on the matter of Palestinian suicide bombing done for the sake of killing Jews.

45. The larger, philosophical context here is Heidegger's critique of ontotheology—his objection to the way theologians and others attempt to master the alterity of God by speaking and writing and ennobling Him. For Heidegger, every discursive invocation of God—no matter how reverential—is really part of human beings' desire to subjugate the real of being. So it is that Heidegger can claim that "the ultimate blow against God and the suprasensory world consists in the fact that God, the first of beings, is degraded to the highest value." Martin Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays,* trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper, 1977), 105.

46. John Irving, *A Prayer for Owen Meany* (New York: Ballantine, 1989), 417.

47. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: Encore, 1972–1973,* trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1998), 45.

48. As Arthur Bradley and Andrew Tate see it, the New Atheists remain in the grip of "a strange, anti-empirical and deeply mythological piety," exempting from skepticism their faith in the power of narrative: "The 'story of creation,' " they write, "reaches its logical conclusion in the creation of stories. Such is the only faith the New Atheist finds it impossible to renounce—the faith in story itself. . . . The problem with the New Atheism is that it is not quite atheist *enough.*" Arthur Bradley and Andrew Tate, *The New Atheist Novel: Fiction, Philosophy and Polemic After 9/11* (London: Continuum, 2010), 105–6.

Chapter Two

1. Aristotle, *Metaphysics,* trans. W. D. Ross, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle,* vol. 2, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1578.

2. Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster,* trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 83.

3. In an attempt to reconcile the seeming particularity of entities in the world with the need for universals in order to make sense of the world, Bertrand Russell isolates universality within a specific type of knowledge—the knowledge of relations. Whereas entities are constantly changing, relations between entities are eternal, even though these relations are outside our thought and dwell in being itself. See Bertrand Russell, "The World of Universals," in *The Problems of Philosophy,* 91–100 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912).

4. Hermann Rauschning, *The Voice of Destruction* (New York: Putnam's, 1940), 238. In his counterfactual novel *The Portage to San Cristobal of A.H.,* George Steiner has Hitler himself elaborate on this rivalry. Found in the Amazonian jungle by an Israeli commando team, Hitler says to them, "My racism was a parody of yours, a hungry imitation. What is a thousand-year *Reich* compared to the eternity of Zion?" George Steiner, *The Portage to San Cristobal of A.H.* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981), 164.

5. The philosopher who in the most sophisticated and convincing manner developed the idea of the proletariat's epistemological privilege is Georg Lukács. For Lukács, the proletariat is the only class capable of becoming the subject-object of history. See Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics,* trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971).

6. Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities,* trans. Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld (New York: Schocken Books, 1990), 31.

7. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), 320.

8. Ibid., 319–20.

9. Ibid., 320.

10. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life,* trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (New York: Verso, 1978), 103.

11. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* 365.

12. Though they have a theoretical kinship with the Frankfurt School in their suspicion of the universal, Laclau and Mouffe come from a much more activist strain of Marxism than that of Theodor Adorno or Max Horkheimer. The key thinker for Laclau and Mouffe is not the politically unengaged Adorno but the active (and jailed) Antonio Gramsci.

13. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (New York: Verso, 1985), 4.

14. In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,* Marx theorizes labor as the origin of all values in society. It is through labor, Marx argues, that subjects can view objects as their own, and this in turn allows them to view their own individuality as a value in itself. He claims, "It is only when the objective world becomes everywhere for man in society the world of man's essential powers—human reality, and for that reason the reality of his *own* essential powers—that all *objects* become for him the *objectification of himself,* become objects which confirm and realize his individuality, become *his* objects: that is, *man himself* becomes the object." Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,* trans. Martin Milligan (New York: International, 1964), 140.

15. Ernesto Laclau, "Constructing Universality," in Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (New York: Verso, 2000), 306.

16. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy,* 155.

17. Ibid., 113.

18. Ibid., 122.

19. Ibid., 125.

20. This is the contradiction at the heart of all identity politics. In the act of promoting one's particular identity, one attests to its self-division as an identity. The self-division or incompleteness makes it possible to talk about the particular identity in universal terms—that is, to talk about it at all in language, which is always universal. Without this self-division, there would be no possibility of articulating the identity. The champion of identity adheres to what is not there.

21. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit,* Hegel makes a similar claim about universality in his discussion of perception. When he draws our attention to all the universal properties that belong to a grain of salt (it is white, it is tart, it is cubical in shape), he sees the way that these properties have only a seeming indifference to one another. As properties of salt, they have been determined and in ways that are necessarily exclusive. It is, however, *this very exclusivity* that founds their linkage, their universality. What Hegel thus calls the sophistry of perception is the attempt to save the unity of the Thing and the specificity of properties by enumerating an infinite series of properties joined by the word "also" or the phrase "insofar as." When we acknowledge specificity and save unity in this way—joining into a series of equivalences, we might say, the various properties of the thing—we obfuscate the very way that, as Hegel puts it, "the Thing is demolished by the very determinateness that constitutes its essence" (G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit,* trans. A. V. Miller [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977], 76). What *undoes a Thing,* in other words, is its most essential property. The primordial act of self-negation or division ushers us into a political world of choice and meaning, but more important than these choices is the determinate act that founds them.

22. Jean-Joseph Goux provides a representative critique of Plato as an ideologist of the ideal form. He argues, "Broadly speaking, the relation between Platonic forms (models, ideal standards) and the concrete world is the displaced yet faithful philosophical parallel of the relation between (fetishized) general equivalents and relative forms, as perceived by the dominant ideology." Jean-Joesph Goux, *Symbolic Economies: After Marx and Freud,* trans. Jennifer Curtiss Gage (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 94.

23. Whereas Aristotle employs the term *kathalou* to designate the universal, Plato prefers to use the general substantive (often preceded by the definite article) without specifically naming it as a "universal." For example, in the *Phaedo,* he claims, "All beautiful things are beautiful by the Beautiful" and "that which is to be one must share in Oneness." Plato, *Phaedo,* trans. G. M. A. Grube, in *Plato: Complete Works,* ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 86, 87.

24. Plato, *Philebus,* trans. Dorothea Frede, in *Plato: Complete Works,* 441.

25. In the *Second Treatise,* Locke makes clear the negative role of the state. He describes its role as ensuring the safety of property and liberty rather than that of creating property relations or freedom. See John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

26. Plato, *Phaedo,* 65. The theory of reminiscence is further developed elsewhere in Plato's work, perhaps most famously in the *Meno,* where Socrates reveals that Meno's uneducated slave can solve mathematical problems for which he had no education. After his demonstration with the slave, Socrates says to Meno, "If the truth about reality is always in our soul, the soul would be immortal so that you should always confidently try to seek out and recollect what you do not know at present" (Plato, *Meno,* trans. G. M. A. Grube, in *Plato: Complete Works,* 886). As this passage indicates, the theory of reminiscence does not follow from the postulate of the immortality of the soul; it is instead the association of knowledge with reminiscence that proves the soul's immortality.

27. In *Looking Away,* Rei Terada argues for remaining at the level of appearance and resisting the leap to the affirmation of fact. She calls this position phenomenophilia and sees it as a critical practice that expresses dissatisfaction without chaining one to a concrete alternative. She explains, "One cannot alter inevitabilities, but can release oneself from hyperboles of affirmation and metaburdens of guilt about wanting them to be different—another thing from perceiving them *as* different. The phenomenophile's suspensions and imagined suspensions of fact perception imply critical insight, as though they were protoassertions of something that could be coming to be and does not yet have the liabilities of anything that is" (Rei Terada, *Looking Away: Phenomenality and Dissatisfaction, Kant to Adorno* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009], 33). The problem with this position is that its avoidance of staking any claim on a definite alternative—what for Terada is a virtue—places it in the role of an ideological supplement. The phenomenophile's looking away doesn't disrupt the functioning of the social machinery but allows it to run smoother. Terada's anti-Hegelianism in *Looking Away* is thus understandable: from Hegel's perspective, Terada offers the strategy of the beautiful soul as the ultimate ethical gesture.

28. Not everyone has failed to appreciate the status of *Theory of the Subject* in relation to Badiou's later work. In his detailed analysis of Badiou's philosophy, Bruno Bosteels identifies it as the key work in Badiou's philosophy insofar as it reveals him as a thoroughly dialectical thinker, a fact obscured in the more celebrated *Being and Event.* Bosteels writes, "Being given this diagnostic and elaboration of an alternative material dialectic in the wake of *Theory of the Subject,* there is something embarrassing and clumsy in the critique according to which Badiou, in *Being and Event,* for example, would fall into the trap of a naive separation, nondialectical, indeed precritical, of two orders or spheres—being and event, knowledge and truth, mortal animal and immortal subject—both distinct and pure." Bruno Bosteels, *Alain Badiou, une trajectoire polémique* (Paris: La fabrique, 2009), 66.

29. Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject,* trans. Bruno Bosteels (New York: Continuum, 2009), 8.

30. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 444.

31. The idea of creating a new universal is unthinkable for Plato because he locates universals in the unchanging world of pure being and he separates pure being completely from the temporal world in which change occurs. When it comes to universal forms, we cannot even discuss them with past or future verb tenses. To do so is to misrepresent the unchanging nature of universality. As he notes in the *Timaeus,* "*Was* and *will be* are forms of time that have come to be. Such notions we unthinkingly but incorrectly apply to everlasting being. For we say that it *was* and *is* and *will be,* but according to the true account only *is* is appropriately said of it." Plato, *Timaeus,* trans. Donald J. Zeyl, in *Plato: Complete Works,* 1241.

32. Plotinus, *The Enneads,* trans. Stephen MacKenna (Burdett, N.Y.: Larson, 1992), 94.

33. For the most part, Hegel takes over Kant's term for universality, the German word *Allgemeinheit,* which means "generality" more than "universality," though it is always translated using the latter word. But Hegel also on occasion uses the adjective form that is etymologically linked to the English word "universal"—*universell.*

34. In *Being and Time,* Martin Heidegger specifically rejects any attempt to retain universality in the process of historicization. This marks the unbridgeable gulf that separates his philosophy of history from Hegel's. For Hegel, the universal is the moment in which history produces eternity, but Heidegger's conception of history implicitly rejects this formulation as nothing but a metaphysical residue in Hegel's thought.

35. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 1992), 180.

36. This is why Alexandre Kojève insists that "mastery is an existential impasse." Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel,* ed. Raymond Queneau (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), 174.

37. G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind,* trans. William Wallace and A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 175. Though the slave's subjection represents the decisive rupture in which freedom emerges, the struggle for recognition itself marks the first indication of the subject's break with natural being. In this struggle, subjects value the other's recognition more than life itself. Even though the struggle for recognition remains an egoistic enterprise, it draws the participants out of the sphere of natural being.

38. Hegel notes, "According to Christianity, the individual *as such* has an infinite value as the object and aim of divine love." Ibid., 239–40.

39. Though Christianity affirms individuality as universal, it does not yet recognize the singularity of the subject as a value. As we claim in the book's penultimate chapter, this recognition would fall to a Christian thinker, but not until the nineteenth century. For Søren Kierkegaard, singularity becomes a value in itself in a way that it wasn't for early Christianity.

40. Christianity's elimination of God as a transcendent being implies an approach to religious belief that many would call atheism. Hegel does not make this leap not simply for reasons of expediency—that he would have become a social and philosophical pariah, like the later J. G. Fichte, who suffered tremendously from accusations of atheism—but because he recognizes that even a God without transcendence remains a blank spot within the order of signification, as the previous chapter sought to demonstrate. Though he identifies the philosophical importance of Christianity in its act of bringing the Jewish God out of its transcendent realm, Hegel's God remains Jewish to the extent it occupies a point of absence within its newfound immanence. In this sense, Hegel remains more a Jewish thinker than Spinoza, whose God manifests itself thoroughly without any blank spaces. Blank spaces are, for Spinoza, simply points at which humans fail to understand God, not the form that God itself takes, as they are for Hegel.

41. Hegel biographer Terry Pinkard claims that "the story is almost surely false. However, its believability for those who later told it lay in its adequately capturing the spirit that was undoubtedly animating the three friends." Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 24.

42. Rebecca Comay argues that Hegel sees the French Revolution as the point at which we recognize that the past can acquire a wholly new significance. With revolution, we can change not the future put the past. She says, "The event is historicized: instead of determining the future, the past is freed to receive a new meaning from the future" (Rebecca Comay, *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011], 133). Though the revolution itself makes this resignification of the past possible, it is absolute knowledge that actually accomplishes it, which is why, according to Comay, French politics requires German philosophy in order to reach its fruition.

43. Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 39.

44. Toward the end of his life, Hegel would still look to Haiti as a signifier of universality. In the midst of an otherwise racist account of black infantilism in the *Philosophy of Mind,* he notes, in a truly remarkable passage, that in Haiti Africans formed a nation on the basis of Christian principles, which shows the universality of these principles. With this statement, Hegel affirms his allegiance to the Haitian Revolution long after any initial enthusiasm that it aroused had died down.

45. Those who attribute an inherent colonialism to universality fail to recognize how universality manifests itself in colonial situations like that of the Haitian Revolution.

46. Nick Nesbitt, *Universal Emancipation: The Haitian Revolution and the Radical Enlightenment* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 155.

47. As David Patrick Geggus notes, "The ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity proclaimed by the revolutionaries in Paris were peculiarly dangerous for Caribbean societies, which represented their complete negation. But at the same time, the overthrow of the ancien régime in France also directly undermined the traditional sources of authority in France's colonies—governor, intendant, law courts, garrison, militia, police. The French Revolution thus enflamed social and political aspirations while weakening the institutions that held them in check." David Patrick Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 9.

48. The great filmic representation of the universality of "La marseillaise" occurs, of course, in *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942). When Victor Laszlo (Paul Henreid) directs the band in Rick's Café to play the French anthem and drown out the Nazis singing "Die Wacht am Rhein," the emotional impact of the moment derives from the song's articulation of a universality that breaks from oppressive German particularity. The fact that this is the national anthem of a colonial power in Morocco belongs to a particularity that has no role in this scene, and one might say that the anthem functions here as a critique of the French as much as of the Nazis.

49. In *On Revolution,* Arendt presents two competing forms of revolution as manifested in the American Revolution and French Revolution, but she never once mentions the Haitian Revolution. To her mind, it simply does not add anything of significance for political thought to the two prior revolutions.

50. This has begun to change in recent years. In *Common Wealth,* for instance, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri assert the political primacy of the Haitian Revolution. They argue that both the American and French Revolutions introduced republics of property, while in Haiti property itself, in the form of slaves, revolted.

51. Peter Hallward, *Damming the Flood: Haiti, Aristide, and the Politics of Containment* (New York: Verso, 2007), 11.

52. Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History,* 133.

53. One of the signs of the contemporary victory of cultural particularity over universality is the emphasis placed on translation. Even when theorists today accept the need for some sort of universal, they do so with the qualification that one must translate the universal according to the particular culture where one employs it. Judith Butler makes this position clear when she notes, "Without translation, the only way the assertion of universality can cross a border is through a colonial and expansionist logic" (Judith Butler, "Restaging the Universal: Hegemony and the Limits of Formalism," in Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* [New York: Verso, 2000], 35). Butler sees translation as an avenue for mitigating the dangers traditionally associated with universality. For Butler and for most of contemporary culturalism, the force of the particular will always demand translation, which is a way of transforming the universal in order to make it more adequate to a different context from the one out of which it came. But no matter how much effort we make

to modify the universal to suit new particularities, no translation will ever be fully adequate. The mantra of culturalism is that something is always lost in translation. The idea that there is something "lost in translation" suggests that each language, each culture, has its own particularity that remains irreducible to the universal realm of meaning, and this particularity will inevitably act as a barrier to the transmission of universals. One can work around this barrier through translation but never overcome it entirely. An ethic arises around respecting the impossibility of a complete and adequate translation. But what defines a language or a culture is the rupture that constitutes it, and this rupture also constitutes the culture's universality.

54. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

55. One might equally contend that the actual rupture with the Ptolemaic system does not occur with the heliocentrism of Copernicus but with Kepler's articulation of the new laws of planetary motion. Though he places the sun in the center, Copernicus retains the harmonious structure of the circular orbit, which Kepler jettisons along with its underlying idealism, in favor of the ellipse.

56. Dave Eggers, *What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng* (New York: Vintage, 2006), 63.

57. Ibid., 308.

58. Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays,* trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper, 1977), 35.

59. The form of Eggers's novel, which cuts back and forth between Atlanta (where Valentino has resettled) and Africa, conveys precisely this harrowing sense of sameness. At one point, Eggers juxtaposes Valentino's walk from an Atlanta hospital to his apartment with his walk to Kakuma (the refugee camp in Kenya that was to become his home for ten years). On the Atlanta walk, Valentino thinks, "I knew that the world was the same everywhere, that there were only inconsequential variations between the suffering in one place and another." Eggers, *What Is the What,* 349.

60. One clear victory of the gay marriage movement occurred in Vermont, which was the first state (in 2000) to legalize civil unions for gay couples. In 2009, Vermont became the first state to authorize gay marriage without a court mandate, and no legislators who supported this agenda were voted out of office because of their support for this initiative. This contrasts with the massive uprising against the champions of civil unions in the 2000 elections, which cost several legislators their elected positions.

Chapter Three

1. Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego,* trans. James Strachey, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* vol. 18 (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 98.

2. It is this feeling of true belonging, not the experience of absolute horror, that soldiers cannot communicate with those who weren't there during battle. The depression that overcomes former soldiers derives just as much from the loss of a sense of belonging as from post-traumatic stress. This loss is captured perfectly in Ernest Hemingway's "Soldier's Home," in which the hero finds that even talking about the war destroys the bond that was the zenith of his existence.

3. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents,* trans. James Strachey, in *The Standard Edition,* 21:115.

4. Michel Onfray reads Freud's critique of Soviet communism as evidence of Freud's reactionary political sympathies. For Onfray, the presence of a critique of communism in Freud's work and the absence of any corresponding critique of fascism indicates sympathy for the latter and hostility to the former. In *Le crépuscule d'une idole,* an attempt to debunk the legend that surrounds Freud, Onfray claims, "One would search in vain in the 6,000 pages of the complete works of Freud for a frank critique of capitalism, but equally of fascism or of National Socialism—though one will find several instances of very polemical attacks against socialism, communism, and Bolshevism" (Michel Onfray, *Le crépuscule d'une idole* [Paris: Grasset, 2010], 477–78). The problem with Onfray's searing indictment is that it elides the thoroughgoing attack on fascism present on almost every page of Freud's work, most notably in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego.* Freud's critiques of communism, in contrast, are those of a potential sympathizer.

5. Joan Copjec, *Imagine There's No Woman: Ethics and Sublimation* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 166.

6. The predominant form that the enjoying Other takes in the West is the figure of the Islamic fundamentalist. Unlike the cynical Westerner, the supposedly naive Muslim believer can really enjoy traditional pleasures like sex or alcohol because they constitute genuine transgressions. Rather than being a figure of licentiousness, the Muslim enjoys through naïveté, and it is the possibility of a naive enjoyment that the Westerner envies.

7. Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo,* trans. James Strachey, in *The Standard Edition,* 13:148.

8. The fact that parricide—or its more developed form, the killing of the king—places the law in suspense makes it impossible to render an ethical judgment on the perpetrator. Before the act, one can condemn it as a crime, and after the act, one can celebrate it as the revolutionary onset of a more just order. But at the moment of the act, no standard exists that could serve as the basis for judgment, which shows the priority of rupture relative to ethics.

9. Freud, *Totem and Taboo,*143.

10. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ,* in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings,* ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 44.

11. The idea that Marxist solidarity has its basis in Christian solidarity should not be seen, as Fredric Jameson and others have noted, to besmirch Marxism with the stain of Christianity. Christianity's anticipation of Marxist solidarity reveals Christianity as something much more than an ideological justification for suffering. This connection reveals the incipient communism of Christianity.

12. Jonathan Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 220.

13. Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism,* trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 42.

14. Paul's terms in Greek is, of course, *agape,* which contrasts with romantic love (*eros*) and friendship (*philia*).

15. Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans,* trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 57.

16. Agamben, *The Time That Remains,* 31.

17. This is the position of Georg Lukács. As Lukács would have it, the proletariat enjoys solidarity because its class aims are inextricable from the aims of society as a whole. This connection to the whole eliminates the barrier to solidarity. But this theory requires Lukács to posit the existence of a social whole in which antagonism no longer plays a constitutive role. See Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics,* trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971).

18. In *Specters of Marx,* Derrida celebrates Marx's engagement with the specter that haunts capitalism while taking him to task for trying to exorcise the specter—like Max Stirner—that haunts his own philosophy. As Derrida conceives it, the deconstructive enterprise consists in keeping the specter in play rather than trying to be rid of it once and for all. In doing so, the thinker remains in an attitude of questioning, which is exactly the position that Heidegger consistently apotheosizes. See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International,* trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994).

19. *The Book of Eli* (Albert and Allen Hughes, 2010) lays out in a programmatic fashion the distinction between Christianity as an emancipatory doctrine and Christianity as an imperial one. In a postapocalyptic world, Eli (Denzel Washington) possesses the only remaining copy of the Bible, and he travels his whole life to find a collective that could find in it the inspiration for new solidarity in a world completely bereft of it. The film's villain, Carnegie (Gary Oldman), attempts to interrupt this quest and steal the book in order to found an order in which he could serve as the paternal figure. For Carnegie, the Bible is the key to establishing a new law, whereas for the group that Eli eventually finds, it can provide the foundation for a new form of solidarity based on exclusion from the law. The film indicates this most forcefully by locating the group on Alcatraz Island. Solidarity forms in the new world at the site of exile in the old one.

20. Because the object exists only insofar as it is lost, there is no way that one can ever obtain it. In his seminar on anxiety, Lacan claims, "The more man approaches, circumscribes, caresses what he believes to be the object of his desire, the more he is in fact turned away and diverted from it" (Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire, livre X: L'angoisse, 1962–1963,* ed. Jacques-Alain Miller [Paris: Seuil, 2004], 52–53). If the subject obtains the object, it ceases to be the object insofar as it ceases to be lost.

21. This is another way of saying that the object-cause of desire appears only with the advent of subjectivity. As Lacan puts it in *Seminar XX,* "For every speaking being, the cause of its desire is, in terms of structure, strictly equivalent, so to speak, to its bending, that is, to what I have called its division as subject." Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: Encore, 1972–1973,* trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1998), 127.

22. Philippe Van Haute captures precisely this paradoxical status of the privileged object in his claim that "the object *a* . . . does give a determination to the void that is introduced by the signifier—but this determination does not destroy this void." Philippe Van Haute, *Against Adaptation: Lacan's Subversion of the Subject,* trans. Paul Crowe and Miranda Vankerk (New York: Other Press, 2002), 151.

23. According to Jennifer Friedlander, the point of masquerade is to sustain the ambiguity of the privileged object, not to invite the subject to try to uncover that object. She writes, "In masquerade, it is never certain what exactly is being claimed, and what, if anything, is being concealed" (Jennifer Friedlander, *Feminine Look: Sexuation, Spectatorship, Subversion* [Albany: SUNY Press, 2008], 64). The capacity of masquerade for sustaining the ambiguity of the object gives it, for Friedlander, an ethical status that the male counterpart to masquerade, imposture, lacks. Imposture attempts to eliminate all ambiguity.

24. Molly Anne Rothenberg, *The Excessive Subject: A New Theory of Social Change* (Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2010), 111.

25. Alain Badiou, "What Is Love?" *Umbr(a)* 1 (1996): 46.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. Brad's very arrival at the playground, it turns out, highlights the porous nature of the boundaries of suburbia and for this reason constituted something of a threat to these women, activating their desire in a milieu in which it has no place. Indeed, when Brad shows up for the first time at the playground when Sarah too is there, the other women confess that they do not know Brad's name, that they never really talked to him, and that his presence made them nervous. In Tom Perotta's novel (on which the film is based), one mother tells Sarah, "You had to think about what you were going to wear in the morning, put on makeup. It was exhausting." Another describes the situation even more starkly, saying to Sarah, "We don't come here to flirt. We come here to look after our children." Tom Perotta, *Little Children: A Novel* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006), 32.

29. Perotta's novel makes this explicit as we see Sarah, in the course of the bikini's purchase, reconsidering her critique of the notion that the unapologetic display of sexual power constitutes a kind of feminist emancipation. This critique had centered on Camille Paglia's "worshipful take on Madonna," but now, in the midst of an awakened adulterous desire, Sarah sees Madonna as a sort of model: "Madonna didn't say, *Oh no, I couldn't possibly wear those cones on my chest. Oh, no, I couldn't pose as a nude hitchhiker.* She just said yes to everything. *Cowboy hats—sure! Sex with Jesus—why not? Motherhood—that's cool, too.* When one role got old, she just moved to the next one. That was a form of liberation in itself, Sarah realized. Only temporary, and not for everyone, but real enough for the lucky few who had the imagination to

pull it off. And the fact was, women in general weren't about to get released from patriarchal control anytime soon, so in the meantime, it was every girl for herself." Perotta, *Little Children,* 89.

30. McGorvey's self-castration does not occur in Perotta's novel. This addition by Field represents a significant transformation of the notion of solidarity expressed. By including this event and depicting Larry's confrontation with the castrated McGorvey, Field highlights the traumatic underpinning of any solidarity.

31. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 160–61.

32. Like Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice,* Jaques plays the part of the necessary exile who allows the solidarity of all the couples to function. Even though Jaques doesn't receive their hatred like Shylock does, his failure to fit in the world of coupling is just as necessary as Shylock's.

33. William Shakespeare, *As You Like It,* in *The Riverside Shakespeare,* 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), act 1, scene 3, lines 96–99.

34. Ibid., scene 1, lines 114–20.

35. The sense of solidarity evident in the encounter between Orlando and the exiled Duke Senior becomes more pronounced in Kenneth Branagh's underappreciated film version of *As You Like It* (2006). Because Branagh casts a white actor as Duke Senior and a black actor as Orlando, he increases the possible antagonism between them by highlighting racial difference. But the solidarity made possible by exile easily overcomes this barrier as well.

36. Igor Newerly, "Preface," in *Ghetto Diary of Janusz Korczak* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1978), 75.

37. Adir Cohen, *The Gate of Light: Janusz Korczak, the Educator and Writer Who Overcame the Holocaust* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994), 65.

38. Samuel Abrahamsen, "The Rescue of Denmark's Jews," in *The Rescue of the Danish Jews: Moral Courage Under Stress,* ed. Leo Goldberger (New York: New York University Press, 1987), 4–5.

39. Emmy Werner points out, "By the time the roundup of the Jews began on October 1, the Danes had succeeded in hiding almost all their entire Jewish population and in moving them to coastal ports for their escape to Sweden." Emmy E. Werner, *A Conspiracy of Decency: The Rescue of the Danish Jews During World War II* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2002), 2.

40. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 171.

41. There is a brief filmic depiction of the spirit of the Dänes during World War II that occurs toward the end of George Seaton's almost forgotten *The Counterfeit Traitor* (1962). As American-Swedish spy Eric Erickson (William Holden) attempts to flee to Sweden through Denmark, the Danish underground goes to great lengths to ensure his safety, and at one point the ordinary Danes on the street spontaneously work to block the Nazis in pursuit of him. This spontaneous act illustrates nicely the sense of solidarity that the Danes felt with those who were excluded.

Chapter Four

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future,* trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 119.

2. Nietzsche's hostility to equality extends to an opposition to equal access to education. Allowing equal access, for Nietzsche, would denigrate education as such. In *Twilight of the Idols,* he notes, "Any higher education is only for the exceptions: you have to be privileged to have the right to such a high privilege. Nothing great or beautiful could ever be common property." Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols,* in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings,* ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 189.

3. For Nietzsche, the very concept of an exchange value would be an oxymoron. If an object can be exchanged, that indicates it has no value. Value exists in distinguishing rather than comparing, and the act of exchange is inevitably a comparison.

4. Rand's theory of the creation of value in the capitalist economy is related to that of Joseph Schumpeter, who views innovation as the ultimate source of all profit. Rand definitely did not share, however, Schumpeter's belief in the eventual triumph of socialism, and Schumpeter did not share Rand's profound elitism. See Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper, 2008).

5. The hero of *Atlas Shrugged,* John Galt, explains the violence of egalitarianism as he defends the strike that he has called. He claims, "Since we have the most to contribute, we will have the least to say. Since we have the better capacity to think, we will not be permitted a thought of our own. Since we will have the judgment to act, we will not be permitted an action of our choice. We will work under directives and controls, issued by those who are incapable of working. They will dispose of our energy, because they have none to offer, and of our product, because they can't produce" (Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* [New York: Penguin, 1999], 740). Galt's sense of the violence done to the elites resonates with so many readers—despite being written in 1957, the novel sold half a million copies in 2009—because it combines elitist belonging with an outsider's paranoia. The follower of Rand can simultaneously feel superior and persecuted, which is a combination that harbors the maximum enjoyment.

6. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 106.

7. Rand sees capitalism as the only possible source of value that avoids force or sacrifice, which testifies not only to her blindness to the force and sacrifice of capitalism's egalitarianism but also to her inability to confront its blatant—and forceful—sacrifice of the lives of the working class. She writes, "The objective theory of values is the only moral theory incompatible with rule by force. Capitalism is the only system based implicitly on an objective theory of values—and the historic tragedy is that this has never been made explicit" (Ayn Rand, "What Is Capitalism?," in Ayn Rand, Nathaniel Branden, Alan Greenspan, and

Robert Hessen, *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* [New York: Signet, 1967], 23). Rand's inability to grasp capitalism itself as the great leveler of modernity is equaled only by her inability to understand the tremendous appeal to force necessary to enact this leveling process.

8. Rand shares with many conservatives an inability to see that the real target of her critique is not Leftists who deviate from the capitalist orthodoxy but capitalism itself. Capitalism is the greatest destroyer of exceptionality in the history of the world. This blindness is even more pronounced among the advocates for family values. No liberal program has ever done as much damage to the traditional family as the exigencies of capitalist development.

9. Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy,* trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 81.

10. Throughout Nietzsche's work there exists a naive—one could call it pre-Hegelian—relation to the signifier. Though he champions the Sophists as the realists of their day, he fails to see how the signifier mediates thought from the beginning. To grant mediation this amount of breadth would be to capitulate entirely to the domain of representation, the slave's domain par excellence.

11. Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject,* trans. Bruno Bosteels (New York: Continuum, 2009), 184.

12. Though there was an operative concept of equality among the ancient Greeks, this equality among free men rested on the inequality of women and slaves. Greek equality was equality for the few, not equality as such. In the midst of what is otherwise a panegyric to Greek political activity, Hannah Arendt attests to the severe limitation at the heart of their equality. She claims, "[In] the political realm . . . all were equals. But this equality of the political realm has very little in common with our concept of equality: it meant to live among and to have to deal only with one's peers, and it presupposed the existence of 'unequals' who, as a matter of fact, were always the majority of the population in a city-state." Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 32.

13. One often associates philosophers with the setting in which they philosophize: Emerson in Concord, Freud in Vienna, William James at Harvard, Heidegger in the Black Forest, de Beauvoir in a Paris café, and so on.

14. René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and Seeking the Truth in the Sciences,* trans. Robert Stoothoff, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes,* vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 115.

15. Following Novalis, Heidegger defines philosophy as homesickness. Here, Heidegger's opposition to Descartes and the project of modern philosophy could not be clearer. Truth, for Descartes, comes when we abandon our home, not when we attempt to return to it or when we long for it.

16. Descartes, *Discourse on the Method,* 122.

17. Ibid., 119.

18. Though he rejects the idea of rupture as Western philosophy formulates it, Levinas does have his own contrasting theory of rupture. He locates rupture in the emergence of absolute alterity, which disrupts any attempt to contain it within a system. The problem with this theory is that it requires a thoroughly domesticated and eviscerated idea of alterity. The Other for Levinas is always vulnerable and susceptible to being wounded, never vicious and teeming with horrific enjoyment. This vulnerability manifests itself most concretely in the face. As Levinas puts it, "The nakedness of the face is destituteness. To recognize the Other is to recognize a hunger" (Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority,* trans. Alphonso Lingus [Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969], 75). He cannot imagine this hunger as carnivorous because the rupture is not really genuine. If it were, the philosophical attempt to prioritize alterity—and thus to prioritize ethics relative to ontology—would collapse.

19. Levinas claims that "we must at least recall the situation of the Cartesian idea of the infinite, in which the *cogito* bursts under the impact of something it cannot contain" (Emmanuel Levinas, *God, Death and Time,* trans. Bettina Bergo [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000], 212). Levinas places the Cartesian rupture at exactly the point where we see an abandonment of rupture—the turn to the ontological proof for the existence of God.

20. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman,* trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 181.

21. François Poulain de la Barre, *De l'égalité des deux sexes* (Paris: Vrin, 2011), 59.

22. Poulain de la Barre's commitment to the egalitarian rupture was not without complication. A few years after writing his defense of sexual equality, he published an argument for male superiority (*De l'excellence des hommes*) that effectively overturned his earlier position. This retreat from rupture mirrors Descartes's own move from the cogito to the res cogitans, from the "I think" to the "thinking thing" that has become an established substance.

23. Thomas Paine sees equality as one of the natural rights that society must preserve. He notes, "Man did not enter into society to become *worse* than he was before, nor to have fewer rights than he had before, but to have those rights secured. His natural rights are the foundation of all his civil rights." Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man,* in *Rights of Man, Common Sense and Other Political Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 119.

24. One of the great ironies of twentieth-century thought is that Jürgen Habermas was a student of Theodor Adorno's and that he represents the final philosophical expression of the Frankfurt School. The entire effort of Adorno and the Frankfurt School is in struggling against reification, even if it means running the risk of being charged with elitism. But Habermas constructs a theory of equality in which reification becomes absolutely unavoidable and integral to the functioning of the theory. All subjects must be fundamentally the same as speaking beings engaged in argument in order for communicative rationality to provide the basis for their equality.

25. Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy,* trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 84.

26. Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation,* trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 13.

27. Ibid., 6.
28. Ibid., 20–21.
29. Ibid., 65.
30. Ibid., 85.
31. Ibid., 62.
32. According to Rancière, "The relation between two ignorant people confronting a book they don't know how to read is simply a radical form of the effort one brings every minute to translating and counter-translating thoughts into words and words into thoughts. The will that presides over the operation is not a magician's secret spell. It is the desire to understand and to be understood without which no man would ever give meaning to the materialities of language. Understanding must be understood in its true sense: not the derisive power to unveil things but the power of translation that makes one speaker confront another." Ibid., 63–64.
33. Brian Turner, *Here, Bullet* (Farmington, Maine: Alice James Books, 2005).
34. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 92.
35. Lucille Fultz, for one, recognizes Morrison's work as a campaign against the inequality underwritten by the idea of difference. She notes, "Morrison's fiction systematically destabilizes the various forms of difference—de jure and de facto: separate-but-(un)equal doctrine, aesthetic positions, dogma, physical limitations, and negative inscriptions—and uses these dualities and dialectics to reshape our consciousness and excite our moral sensibilities." Lucille P. Fultz, *Toni Morrison: Playing with Difference* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 110.
36. Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1970), 7.
37. Morrison's version of the story without any spaces is an enactment of what the complete deterritorialization that Deleuze and Guattari advocate would look like. Here, there is no interruption of the flow of being, but rather than freeing us from the burden of reterritorialization, this flow subjects us to the dominance of oneness. Unable to differentiate, the reader, like Pecola Breedlove in the novel, remains at the mercy of the ideology without respite.
38. Morrison, *Bluest Eye,* 9.
39. Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Penguin, 1988), 210.
40. Ibid., 165. Many critics have joined Paul D and taken up a critical position against Sethe, though none have gone so far as to accuse her of falling into animality. Even sympathetic critics, like J. Brooks Bouson, fail to see the break that the act occasions. For Bouson, the act is not an interruption in the logic of slavery but a product of the shame that slavery produced in Sethe. He views it as "a protective and brutal act that grows out of Sethe's intense shame." J. Brooks Bouson, *Quiet as It's Kept: Shame, Trauma, and Race in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), 148.
41. Jean Wyatt, "Giving Body to the Word: The Maternal Symbolic in Toni Morrison's *Beloved,*" *PMLA* 108, no. 3 (1993): 476.
42. Obviously, the point is not that one must kill one's own child in order to affirm one's equality. Morrison's novel focuses on just this act in order to emphasize the supreme trauma that one must endure in order to be an authentic egalitarian. The cost of equality is the loss of that which is dearest in the world because only this loss severs one's rootedness in a place.

43. Toni Morrison, *Paradise* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 3.
44. In the first book of *Ideas,* his phenomenological masterwork, Edmund Husserl describes phenomenology's attempt to bypass any theoretical approach to the world. He states, "We take our start from what lies *prior to* all standpoints: from the total realm of whatever is itself given intuitionally and prior to all theorizing, from everything that one can immediately see and seize upon—if only one does not let himself be blinded by prejudices and prevented from taking into consideration whole classes of genuine data." Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book,* trans. F. Kersten (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998), 38–39.
45. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1962), 376. The rupture of the moment of vision allows the individual to encounter its death as its own and to thereby achieve an authentic being toward death. This experience of being toward death separates the individual from its world and constitutes it as an individual. As Heidegger puts it in his lecture series on the history of the concept of time, "Dasein is essentially its death. With death, the impending is not something worldly, but Dasein itself." Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time,* trans. Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 313.
46. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness,* trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), 797.
47. Jean-Paul Sartre, "What Is Literature?," trans. Bernard Frechtman, in *"What Is Literature?" and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 68.
48. Catherine Malabou interprets Heidegger's critique of metaphysics as a disguised critique of capitalism, despite Heidegger's reluctance to enter the terrain of political philosophy. She writes, "In Heidegger's philosophy *metaphysics* and *capitalism* coincide." Catherine Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction,* trans. Carolyn Shread (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 44.
49. Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 163.
50. As Heidegger's onetime student Herbert Marcuse sees it, the possible link between Heidegger's thought and Marxism does not reside in Heidegger's rejection of an original isolation of the subject but in his prioritizing of practice in relation to theory, a move that Heidegger shares with the young Marx. For Marcuse's intriguing attempt to assimilate Heidegger to Marxism, see the posthumously constructed Herbert Marcuse, *Heideggerian Marxism,* ed. Richard Wolin and John Abromeit (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).
51. As Sartre puts it, "Conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others." Sartre, *Being and Nothingness,* 475.
52. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method,* trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Vintage, 1968), 150–51.

53. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Flies,* trans. Stuart Gilbert, in *No Exit and Three Other Plays* (New York: Random House, 1989), 117.

54. Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 435.

55. The retreat in *Being and Time* anticipates the even more philosophically lamentable retreat in the 1930s, Heidegger's famous *Kehre.* Though Heidegger himself paints this turning as a break from the emphasis on will, it distances him further from the rupture and thus ironically places him even more proximate to the nefarious aspects of the metaphysical project that he wants to overcome.

56. It is easy to see in the trajectory of *Being and Time* the move from a politics of the Left (perhaps close to Sartre's) to a politics of the Right that would allow Heidegger to assume the rectorship at the University of Freiburg. There is a clear philosophical path leading to Heidegger's Nazism, a path that was altogether avoidable had he remained within his initial insight. For an unequalled account of the radical potential of this initial insight, see Walter A. Davis, *Inwardness and Existence: Subjectivity in/and Hegel, Heidegger, Marx, and Freud* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

57. Though Heidegger always insisted that *Being and Time* was an unfinished work, the problem is, according to Slavoj Žižek, the opposite. Heidegger's masterpiece goes on past the point where rupture might be sustained. As Žižek puts it, "The problem with *Sein und Zeit* is not that the book is unfinished, but that it is TOO LONG, containing an excess which is superfluous, not fitting the rest of the book—Heidegger's problem after *Sein und Zeit* was not how to finish the book, but how to get rid of—how to accommodate, find a proper place for—the excess at its end." Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 107.

58. In the terms of Hannah Arendt, women are confined to the role of laborers who simply reproduce themselves and the social order, while men have the possibility of entering into the public world and engaging in political action, though this possibility has become degraded in modernity.

59. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 19–20.

60. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Knopf, 2010), 75. The fact that it took until 2010, over sixty years after the original publication of de Beauvoir's masterpiece in French, to have a complete English translation is perhaps the greatest scandal in the history of twentieth-century philosophy. The only recourse for an Anglophone theorist wanting to read de Beauvoir's book was to learn French and read it in the original. To compare the translations and unthinking excisions, see Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* trans. H. M. Parshley (New York: Vintage, 1989), 65. But the scandal does not end there. Though Borde and Malovany-Chevallier's translation represents an improvement on Parshley's, it still falls short of the original. The excessively literal quality of the new translation creates awkwardness in English that does not exist in de Beauvoir's French original.

61. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, Volume I,* trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1971), 489. Aquinas claims that woman was fittingly made from the rib of man since to have made woman from the head would have given her authority over him. To have made woman from man's feet, he adds, would be to make woman man's slave. In a nod to birth, he sees the side of man as having a "sacramental signification; for from the side of Christ sleeping on the Cross the Sacraments flowed—namely blood and water—on which the Church was established" (490).

62. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,* rev. ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999), 17.

63. The treatment of psychoanalysis in *The Second Sex* might have been altogether different. In the course of her research for the book, de Beauvoir asked Jacques Lacan to meet with her for four interviews in which he would respond to a variety of questions. Lacan proposed instead that they talk for five or six months. These interviews, if they had occurred, could have enabled de Beauvoir to see how psychoanalysis might be reconciled with both existentialism and feminism. For an account of these negotiations, see Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan,* trans. Barbara Bray (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

64. De Beauvoir, *Second Sex,* 148.

65. The shame of embodiment in a man's relationship to his visible genitals is distilled in an exemplary way by the female character Ruth in John Updike's *Rabbit, Run:* "The thing was, they wanted to be admired there. They really did want that. They weren't that ugly but they thought they were. That was the thing that really surprised her in high school how ashamed they were really, how grateful they were if you just touched them there and how quick word got out if you would. What did they think, they were monsters? If they'd just thought, they might have known you were curious too, that you like that strangeness there like they liked yours, no worse than women in their way, all red wrinkles, my God, what was it in the end? No mystery. That was the great thing she discovered, that it was no mystery, just a stuck-on-looking bit that made them king and if you went along with it could be good or not so good." John Updike, *Rabbit, Run* (New York: Ballantine, 1996), 137.

66. De Beauvoir, *Second Sex,* 203.

67. In France, women did not obtain the vote until 1944, twenty-four years after the achievement in the United States.

68. Of course, Sanger herself is no pure partisan of rupture and of the equality that follows from it. Her philosophical adherence to eugenics reveals a belief in natural inequality, despite the effect that her work on behalf of birth control accomplished for female equality.

69. In her influential *The Feminine Mystique,* Betty Friedan advocates not that women abandon all household activities but claims that they "must unequivocally say 'no' to the housewife image" (Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* [New York: Norton, 1963], 342). Though Friedan steps away from the feminist break by envisioning future women who find "completion" or "fulfillment," her insistence on the necessity of women's rupture from their socially assigned place represents the key moment in her politics.

70. Sheila Rowbotham, *Women in Movement: Feminism and Social Action* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 273.

71. Marlene LeGates, *In Their Time: A History of Feminism in Western Society* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 359–60.

72. Ibid., 362.

Chapter Five

1. The attack against Afghanistan after the September 11, 2001, attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon had a similar title, though with a different focus—Operation Enduring Freedom. This was a compromise name, however, given after Muslim protests against the first choice—Operation Infinite Justice.

2. For the definitive statement of this conception of freedom, see F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

3. In his most famous statement from the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson clearly identifies freedom as a natural right rather than one produced by the introduction of law. Jefferson writes, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." See http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/index.htm.

4. John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 283.

5. Ibid., 306.

6. For an excellent account of the law-destroying nature of Friedman's project, see Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Picador, 2008).

7. Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 9.

8. As Foucault sees it, the absence of a universal law imposed on the Greek subject creates the space for what he calls the art of freedom. The Greeks achieve free subjectivity without the burden of subjection to the law. In *The Use of Pleasure,* Foucault notes, "For them, reflection on sexual behavior as a moral domain was not a means of internalizing, justifying, of formalizing general interdictions imposed on everyone; rather, it was a means of developing—for the smallest minority of the population, made up of free, adult males—an aesthetics of existence, the purposeful art of a freedom perceived as a power game." Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure,* trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 252–53.

9. Laura Kipnis, *Against Love: A Polemic* (New York: Vintage, 2004), 34. Subsequent citations occur parenthetically in the text.

10. Goldwyn's *A Walk on the Moon* (1999) is the story of Pearl Kantrowitz (Diane Lane), whose adulterous affair with Walker Jerome (Viggo Mortensen) is set explicitly in the context of the revolutionary social movements of the 1960s: Walker is the seller of blouses who first outfits Pearl in a tie-dyed blouse, Pearl's and Walker's first sexual coupling comes on the evening of Neil Armstrong's walk on the moon, and Pearl and Walker attend Woodstock. Though in the end the film returns Pearl to her husband, Marty (Liev Schreiber), it refuses to punish her, suggesting instead that it is Marty who must change in order for their relationship to continue. In Haynes's *Far from Heaven* (2002), we see adultery underscoring the repressive normative codes and values of the 1950s. These codes and values are explored both in the interracial relationship between Cathy Whitaker (Julianne Moore) and Raymond Deagan (Dennis Haysbert) and in the homosexual affairs of Cathy's husband, Frank (Dennis Quaid).

11. For instance, Descartes in his late work *The Passions of the Soul* (1649) makes explicit the opposition between law and freedom that governs his entire philosophy. Freedom exists, for Descartes, in the interstitial space left for it by necessity. Divine law or providence controls everything, he contends, "except for matters dependent on our free will." René Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul,* trans. Robert Stoothoff, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes,* vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 380.

12. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract,* in *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings,* ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 41.

13. Ibid., 54. Despite his anticipation of Kant in *The Social Contract,* Rousseau does sometimes slip back into a celebration of humanity in its natural being, a celebration that fails to take into account the absolute absence of freedom in nature. This is especially pronounced in *Émile; or, On Education,* which was published in the same year (1762) as *The Social Contract.* See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile; or, On Education,* trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

14. The most far-reaching defense of the thing in itself in Kant's thought takes it as simply Kant's way of formulating a flawed approach to things rather than as something existing altogether outside the knowing subject. As Graham Bird puts it in his commentary on the first *Critique,* "For Kant genuine reality is that of an immanent experience tied to sensibility, and the reality of things in themselves is a problematic and potentially illusory consequence of our concepts." Graham Bird, *The Revolutionary Kant: A Commentary on the "Critique of Pure Reason"* (Chicago: Open Court, 2006), 758.

15. In the *Groundwork,* Kant does already grasp that the moral law frees the subject from the determinate natural world. The difference between natural laws (which are absolutely determinate) and moral laws (which create freedom) is that the latter are not simply laws but "*the representation* of laws," which allows for the subject to develop a free relation to them rather than to blindly follow their dictates. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals,* in *Practical Philosophy,* trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 66.

16. Kant's conception of law creates a radical distinction between laws of nature and human laws, a distinction that earlier philosophers did not recognize. In *The Spirit of the Laws,* Montesquieu exemplifies this tendency. He notes, "Particular intelligent beings can have laws that they have made, but they also have some that they have not made. Before there were intelligent beings, they

were possible; therefore, they had possible relations and consequently possible laws" (Charles de Secondat Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws,* trans. Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller, and Harold Samuel Stone [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989], 4). Whatever moral law humans give to themselves, according to Montesquieu, inheres implicitly in the laws of nature. There is no rupture.

17. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason,* in *Practical Philosophy,* 203. For an extended analysis of the turn from the privileging of freedom in the *Groundwork* to the radicalized logic that begins with the moral law in the second *Critique,* see Henry Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

18. This is not to say that one cannot embrace one's natural inclinations; many do so in defiance of the moral law. But one always embraces one's inclinations after having been alienated from them, which means it is a mediated embrace. One approaches one's own inclinations as if they came from someone else.

19. John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism,* in *Utilitarianism and On Liberty* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2003), 210.

20. In the second *Critique,* Kant makes clear the relation between the form of the law and the subject's freedom. He says, "A will for which the mere lawgiving form of a maxim can alone serve as a law is a free will." Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason,*162.

21. Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason,* in *Religion and Rational Theology,* trans. and ed. Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 146–47.

22. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991), 94.

23. Ibid., 35. Utopian attempts to eradicate violence fail because they don't account for the ontological primacy of violence. For the utopian of whatever stripe, violence erupts because some other aspect of our existence misfires: for instance, Charles Fourier links violence to poverty; Wilhelm Reich traces it to sexual repression; and Francis Fukuyama sees large-scale violence as the product of competing ideologies. In each case and in numerous others, there is an explanation for violence in other foundational disturbances. This way of understanding violence is not confined to utopian speculation but infiltrates ordinary liberal and conservative conceptions as well. For the liberal, violence is the product of inadequate education or insufficient life chances, while for the conservative it is the result of an absence of proper moral training. In each case, the controlling belief is that the correction of the foundational problem—a better education or superior moral training—would eradicate the violence. There are few who try to theorize violence itself as foundational.

24. See Waller Newell, "The Crisis of Manliness," *Weekly Standard,* August 3, 1998, 18; Richard Lessner, "Male Identity Crisis: Constitution's Defender," *Manchester New Hampshire Union Leader,* August 12, 1998; and Terrence Moore, "Wimps and Barbarians: The Son of Murphy Brown," *Claremont Review of Books* 4.1 (2003): http://www.claremont.org/publications/crb/id.1192/article_detail.asp. Newell inveighs against the way "the gurus of sensitivity have tried to convince men to become open, fluid, nonhegemonic, and genderless beings who are unafraid to cry" and insists that "little boys still want to play war and shoot up the living room with plastic howitzers, and we cannot give them all Ritalin," (18).

25. The revolutionary dimension of self-inflicted violence also becomes apparent in the scene where the film's protagonist faces a boss prepared to fire him. As Slavoj Žižek points out, the hero attacks himself and thereby exposes the boss's implicit hostility, which completely inverts the power relations in the scene. As a result of this self-assault, the hero eliminates the threat of firing and emancipates himself from his oppressive boss. See Slavoj Žižek, "An Ethical Plea for Lies and Masochism," in *Lacan and Contemporary Film,* ed. Todd McGowan and Sheila Kunkle, 173–86 (New York: Other Press, 2004).

26. Heidegger's most sustained discussion of freedom occurs in his lectures devoted to Schelling's *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom.* See Martin Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom,* trans. Joan Stambaugh (Athens: Ohio University Pres, 1985).

27. Her late lectures on Kant and judgment have been posthumously collected and published. In these lectures, Arendt celebrates judgment as the faculty that lifts us out of our private determinations and frees us to act publicly. See Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy,* ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

28. In her commentary of Arendt's posthumously published development of Kant's political philosophy, Linda Zerilli emphasizes that the importance of the Kantian theory of judgment for Arendt is its ability to see the actuality of freedom as a cut in a world where utility rules. She claims, "A new event, from the perspective of the spectator poised to apprehend it in its freedom, is not a means toward an empirical end of any kind, and thus the validity of the judgment in no way turns on the realization of an end. Validity is rather tied to an affirmation of freedom" (Linda M. G. Zerilli, "'We Feel Our Freedom': Imagination and Judgment in the Thought of Hannah Arendt," *Political Theory* 33, no. 2 [2005]: 178). Though Kantian judgment lacks the validity of cognition, it makes up for this deficit through its capacity for identifying freedom in a way that cognition cannot. This is why, according to Zerilli, Arendt turns to Kant's *Critique of Judgment* in the attempt to develop a Kantian theory of politics.

29. Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 118. Arendt's rejection of the possibility of economic or social freedom places her proximate to Alain Badiou, for whom the event, which is in some sense his version of the manifestation of freedom, cannot occur in the economic realm. Like Arendt, Badiou sees economy as a sphere where necessity rules, but politics provides the space for freedom.

30. Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind, Volume Two: Willing,* ed. Mary McCarthy (San Diego: Harcourt, 1977), 26.

31. F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom,* trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 48.

32. Ibid., 49.

33. Arendt's failure to account for ideology does not stem from her rejection of Marxism but from her rejection of psychoanalysis. Her conception of freedom cannot survive an encounter with the unconscious.

34. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History,* trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956), 456.

35. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* in *The Riverside Shakespeare,* 2nd ed., ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), act 4, scene 7, lines 124–26.

36. The idea that the dead father is the fundamental figure of authority becomes fully elaborated in Lacan's thought. For Lacan, the authority that governs the symbolic order is not any individual or group existing in reality but what he calls the Name of the Father, the signifier that stands in for the living father and marks his death or absence. No actual father can ever fully embody this ideal, and whenever anyone tries, the inadequacy of the actual being becomes evident.

37. Ernest Jones, *Hamlet and Oedipus* (New York: Norton, 1976), 90.

38. For A. C. Bradley, Hamlet's lethargy—and delay in carrying out the ghost's command—is the result of his profound melancholy. This is perhaps the most widespread critical diagnosis of what ails Hamlet and prevents him from acting. See A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (New York: Macmillan, 1905).

39. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy,* in *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings,* ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 40.

40. As Walter Davis notes in his exceptional analysis of the play, Hamlet's freedom has the effect of putting all the other characters in the play and the spectators on existential trial. According to Davis, "action for Hamlet plunges us into change, putting us at issue and at risk. All symbolic supports for one's being are thereby overturned." Walter A. Davis, *Death's Dream Kingdom: The American Psyche Since 9-11* (London: Pluto Press, 2006), 228

41. Harold Bloom, *Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2003), 134.

42. Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* act 4, scene 4, lines 18–20.

43. At the close of the second *Critique,* Kant attests to the sublime status of the moral law as he famously compares it to the vastness of space itself. He says, "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, the more often and more steadily one reflects on them: *the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.*" Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason,* 269.

44. In his famous redefinition of Freud's concept of sublimation, Lacan states, "The most general formula that I can give you of sublimation is the following: it raises an object . . . to the dignity of the Thing." Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960,* trans. Dennis Porter, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: Norton, 1992), 112.

45. Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* act 4, scene 4, lines 55–56.

46. In his autobiography, Gandhi explains the word originated from a contest that he created. The winning word was "sadagraha," but Gandhi changed it, he claims, for the sake of clarity. See Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth,* trans. Mahadev Desai (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 319.

47. Mahatma Gandhi, "Independence v. Swaraj," in *Selected Political Writings,* ed. Dennis Dalton (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), 99.

48. Mahatma Gandhi, "Satyagraha—Not Passive Resistance," ibid., 53.

49. Slavoj Žižek, "Disputations: Who Are You Calling Anti-Semitic?," *New Republic,* January 7, 2009, http://www.tnr.com/article/politics/disputations-who-are-you-calling-anti-semitic.

50. Žižek claims, "No, Hitler did not 'have the balls' to really change things. All his actions were fundamentally reactions: he acted so that nothing would really change; he acted to prevent the communist threat of real change." Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008), 209.

51. Ronald J. Terchek, "Gandhian Autonomy in the Late Modern World," in *Gandhi, Freedom, and Self-Rule,* ed. Anthony J. Parel (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2000), 48.

Chapter Six

1. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 216.

2. The replacing of social authority as an ultimate value with singularity did not occur only in France, nor was it solely the result of the act of revolt. The engine for this transformation was also the changing nature of capitalism, which became increasingly focused on consumption after the 1960s. The paternalistic dimension of monopoly capitalism that produced the company man gave way to a global capitalism that produced the pathological narcissist, a subject obsessed with realizing its own singularity. But the singularity of the pathological narcissist always remains "singularity." It is a singularity that must constantly display itself to an admiring ego ideal, most often a paternal imago.

3. Michel Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976,* trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 10–11. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* Foucault offers an earlier formulation of his method that emphasizes how his approach highlights diversity rather than producing a homogeneous whole. He says, "The horizon of archaeology, therefore, is not *a* science, *a* rationality, *a* mentality, *a* culture; it is a tangle of interpositivities whose limits and points of intersection cannot be fixed in a single operation. Archaeology is a comparative analysis that is not intended to reduce the diversity of discourses, and to outline the unity that must totalize them, but is intended to divide up their diversity into different figures. Archaeological comparison does not have a unifying, but a diversifying, effect." Michel Fou-

cault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Random House, 1972), 159–60.

4. Other champions of local knowledge believe that we must pursue it because there is no genuine alternative. This is the position of influential anthropologist Clifford Geertz. As he puts it in the preface to his *Local Knowledge,* "If Everything In General is out of reach, and likely to stay there, not everything in particular is." Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), x.

5. Of course, the differences between Foucault, Deleuze, and Derrida are significant, but they do share a suspicion of the universal that sets them apart from their philosophical ancestors. When they are critical of one another, it is most often because they view the other veering too close to an embrace of universality. For instance, Derrida takes Foucault to task for the totalizing risk inherent in his magisterial history of madness when he notes, "By virtue of the construction of his project he sometimes runs the risk of being totalitarian." Jacques Derrida, "Cogito and the History of Madness," in *Writing and Difference,* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 57.

6. Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977,* trans. Colin Gordon et al. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 81.

7. As the subtitle of Driss Bellahcène's study of Foucault puts it, his work is an "elegy of discontinuity." See Driss Bellahcène, *Michel Foucault, ou l'ouverture de l'histoire à la vérité: Eloge de la discontinuité* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008). In addition, Judith Revel describes Foucault's approach as one that "implies the violent critique of history as a *continuum* and, in that same way, the introduction of scansions that take the form of a rupture." Judith Revel, "Michel Foucault: Discontinuité de la pensée ou pensée de la discontinu?," *Le Portique: Revue de philosophie et de sciences humaines* 13–14 (2004), http://leportique.revues.org/index635.html.

8. Foucault, "Two Lectures," 82.

9. Foucault's hostility to dialectics—and thus to Hegel and Sartre—stems from his view that dialectics locates the singular within a system and always places it in relation to other singularities, thereby effectively denying the existence of singularity. As David Macey notes in his biography of Foucault, he gravitates toward Nietzsche because Nietzsche offers a genuine alternative. Macey claims that Foucault finds in Nietzsche "the promise of liberation from dialectical thinking" (David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault* [New York: Pantheon Books, 1993], 153). Foucault shares with Deleuze an approach to Nietzsche that views him as first and foremost an antidialectical thinker.

10. Deleuze believes that philosophy has historically confused the universal with the general, a confusion that he associates most directly with Hegel. (It is true that Hegel's word for universality, *Allgemeinheit,* denotes generality as much as or more than universality.) This confusion, according to Deleuze, leads to the disappearance of singularity in Hegel's thought. In *Difference and Repetition,* Deleuze claims, "Hegel substitutes the abstract relation of the particular to the concept in general for the true relation of the singular and the universal in the Idea. He thus remains in the reflected element of 'representation,' within simple generality. He represents concepts instead of dramatizing Ideas: he creates a false theatre, a false drama, a false movement." Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition,* trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 10.

11. For the definitive psychoanalytic critique of Foucault's conception of law and its relation to resistance, see Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994).

12. In Foucault's own work, attention to the local rupture remains prominent, and his radical turn in the last two published volumes of *The History of Sexuality* indicates this commitment. He returns to the Greeks and the Romans in *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self* in order to find examples where the rupture of subjectivity occurs without the rubric of a universal law. A similar commitment to rupture is almost entirely absent in the historicism that Foucault inspired, especially in the United States. In this historicism, reducing the artwork to its context becomes the final cause of the critic's work.

13. Russell is straightforward in his identification of the proper name with the particular. He proclaims, "Proper names stand for particulars, while other substantives, adjectives, prepositions, and verbs stand for universals." Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 93.

14. Ibid., 54.

15. Saul A. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 48.

16. Ibid., 96.

17. Kripke's account of rigid designation does not focus on subjectivity but primarily on objects. That is, he grants objects just as much as subjects a singularity that derives from the process of signification. But even though he never explicitly makes this point, the singularity of objects is the effect of the subject's singularity. If there were no speaking subject, there would be no singular objects, and the subject is drawn to this singularity in objects because it is homologous to the subject's own. In the singularity of the object, the subject finds the expression of its own irreducibility.

18. This is a charge that Deleuze levels at Antigone, who is a figure who privileges the singularity of her brother above all else. Deleuze sees the subject as the reification of singularity rather than its assertion. He describes this priority of singularities in *The Logic of Sense,* where he claims, "Far from being individual or personal, singularities preside over the genesis of individuals and persons; they are distributed in a 'potential' which admits neither Self nor I, but which produces them by actualizing or realizing itself" (Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense,* trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale [New York: Columbia University Press, 1990], 103). Deleuze posits an ontology of singularity, in which only singularities exist. There is thus no need, from this perspective, for the signifier to introduce the possibility of singularity. All that signification can do is mask the being of singularities, which explains Deleuze's consistent diatribes against representation. But what he leaves unexplained is why the

signifier emerges in the first place, why singularities lend themselves to the production of the signifier.

19. Nietzsche's notion of the eternal return—the point at which his philosophy touches the theory of rupture—reflects the horror implicit in the subject's singularity. By embracing the eternal return, one accedes to one's singularity without any possible respite, and Nietzsche sees this as the most difficult task.

20. Kojin Karatani, *Architecture as Metaphor: Language, Number, Money,* trans. Sabu Kohso (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), 152–53.

21. Saint Augustine, *City of God,* trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin, 2003).

22. Georg Lukács, *The Young Hegel: Studies in the Relations Between Dialectics and Economics,* trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976), 313.

23. As Paul Franco, a fierce defender of Hegel as a political philosopher, describes Hegel's position, "War is necessary to shake people out of their comfortable privacy and rigid particularity and reconnect them to the universal." Paul Franco, *Hegel's Philosophy of Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 332.

24. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening,* ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 121.

25. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History,* trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956), 33.

26. The commonsensical reading of this disjunction between Hegel's insistence on subjectivity in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and his vision of history in which subjectivity is sacrificed in *The Philosophy of History* is that he became more conservative as his career advanced. The problem with this thesis is that it tacitly accepts the contrast between the universal and the singular that Hegel's philosophy refuses. As Catherine Malabou shows in her insightful reading of Hegel, it is through discovering the universal that one engages the singularity of the subject. See Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, and Dialectic,* trans. Lisabeth During (New York: Routledge, 2005).

27. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit,* trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 19.

28. Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to "Philosophical Fragments,"* vol. 1, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 148.

29. Kierkegaard, *Sickness unto Death,* 107.

30. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin,* ed. and trans. Reidar Thomte (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 160.

31. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Reproducibility (Third Version)," trans. Harry Zohn and Edmund Jephcott, in *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938–1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 253.

32. Ibid., 255–56.

33. The idea that film can capture singularity through content serves as a fetish for many films and spectators. It allows for the disavowal of the absence of any actual singularity. No matter what the content—a violent tsunami, the assassination of a president, the moment when two people fall in love—the reduction of the singular object to a series of continuous images most often serves to eliminate its singularity. Most films fake the encounter with the singularity that they proffer.

34. As a form of punctuation, the cut has a precise parallel in Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic practice. Even though it meant his expulsion from the International Psychoanalytical Association, Lacan refused to give up his method of punctuating the psychoanalytic process—the short session. The short session reflects Lacan's faith in the power of rupture. While the standard psychoanalytic session lasted fifty minutes, Lacan abandoned this prescribed time and would cut off his analysands at an unpredetermined point, sometimes after just a few minutes of analysis. Though many have condemned the practice of the short session as a bald attempt to extract more money from analysands, Lacan's theoretical justification for it was sound and related to his negative ontology: by punctuating the session with the unforeseen cut, he would force subjects to move toward an affirmation of their singularity rather than delaying and keeping their distance from it. The idea of the short session was to force the singularity of the subject to the fore by means of the sharp cut, homologous to the sharp cut that often occurs in the cinema.

35. This is the critique of montage made famous by André Bazin, who speaks out on behalf of the cinematic object's singularity that is inevitably lost, as he sees it, in the didacticism of montage. Bazin prefers the use of deep-focus photography to montage because it communicates the singularity of the various objects in the image rather than forcing them into a dialectical relation that would violate that singularity. What Bazin misses is the constitutive role of the cut in the formation of singularity. He assumes that being itself is singular and that the task of the cinema consists simply in reproducing it.

36. Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory,* trans. Jay Leyda (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1949), 106.

37. Ibid., 16.

38. Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics,* ed. and trans. Steven Corcoran (New York: Continuum, 2010), 37.

39. Béla Balázs, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art,* trans. Edith Bone (New York: Dover, 1970), 147.

40. Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End: Notes on Politics,* trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 59.

41. In *Imagine There's No Woman,* Joan Copjec describes in her account of Jacques Lacan's *objet petit a,* or "object-cause of desire," how an object can overlap itself. She notes, "The object a and the external object are not two different objects but, as objects of the drive, a single object that has the peculiar 'feature' of not coinciding with itself." Joan Copjec, *Imagine There's No Woman: Ethics and Sublimation* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 60.

42. Agamben, *Means Without End,* 56. Agamben's emphasis on gesture functions as a critique of Deleuze's approach to cinema, which focuses on the form that the image takes. This is the difference between a philosophy of discontinuity or rupture and a philosophy of continuity or the whole. While gesture interrupts the reign of the image, the image attempts to cover all such interruptions. As a result, taking the image as one's point of departure necessarily leads to seeing the cinema in terms of continuity, even when Deleuze begins to see "aberrant movement" as the key to the time-image. In Deleuze's film theory, this aberrant movement always takes place within the continuity provided by the image. See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image,* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

43. The confession of a betrayal continues the betrayal by attempting to pay a symbolic debt and to even the terrain again on which one relates. In its standard form, the verbal confession cannot reverse a betrayal.

44. Often those who take up the mantle of singularity are not silently criticizing politics but loudly doing so. This is the case with George Orwell in *1984.* The novel shows how totalitarian systems demand that subjects abandon their singularity and destroy the singularity of others. This becomes clearest when Winston succumbs to the authorities and betrays his lover, Julia, despite his plea to himself to sustain his love for her in the face of the severest torture. Though Orwell leaves the political orientation of the totalitarian system in *1984* ambiguous—it might be communist or it might be fascist—the real target of the novel is politics as such. *1984* is an ethical indictment of politics made in the name of the singular. Because it privileges ethics over politics, the singularity that *1984* champions cannot be the singularity of rupture. This is why *1984* is ultimately a failed novel.

45. Aída de Suárez, quoted in Jo Fisher, *Mothers of the Disappeared* (Boston: South End Press, 1989), 54.

46. The Asociación Civil Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, or the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, also adopted a politics of singularity. They worked—and continue to work—to reunite abducted children with their birth families. In a sense, this group's commitment to rupture is even greater than that of the Madres, since they have no qualms about ripping a child from the only family that it has known for the sake of blood relatives whom the child might not remember. In her book on these women, Rita Arditti takes note of the violence involved in what they are doing. She states, "Learning the truth hurts, and a strong emotional reaction usually follows the news" (Rita Arditti, *Searching for Life: The Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the Disappeared Children of Argentina* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999], 121). For the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo the pain that the children experience when they are taken out of their adoptive homes is necessary for the discovery of their singularity, which the abduction and subsequent adoption threaten.

Chapter Seven

1. The problem for Jacques Derrida is that philosophers have generalized the animal in order to constitute the rupture. He notes, "I would like to have

the plural *animals* heard in the singular. There is no Animal in the general singular, separated from man by a single, indivisible limit. We have to envisage the existence of 'living creatures,' whose plurality cannot be assembled within the single figure of an animality that is simply opposed to humanity." Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am,* trans. David Wills, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 47.

2. The two landmark works of sociobiology from the 1970s are Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976) and Edward O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978).

3. Drake Bennett, "Out of Line," *Boston Globe,* June 27, 2010, http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/ideas/articles/2010/06/27/out_of_line/.

4. Charles Patterson makes this connection between violence to animals and violence to other humans most explicit in his *Eternal Treblinka,* a work that sees a direct through line from the slaughterhouse to the gas chamber. Patterson claims, "Throughout the history of our ascent to dominance as the master species, our victimization of animals has served as a model and foundation for our victimization of each other. The study of human history reveals the pattern: first, humans exploit and slaughter animals; then, they treat other people like animals and do the same to them." Charles Patterson, *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust* (New York: Lantern Books, 2002), 109.

5. In the East, the connection between humans and other animals on the basis of suffering occurs much earlier due to the prominence that suffering has in Buddhist ontology. Since suffering is the predominant characteristic of human existence, human difference cannot have a central role. This is not to say that there is no rupture at all within Buddhism. The concept of Nirvana introduces the possibility of a rupture from the incessant suffering that characterizes the cycles of rebirth.

6. Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation,* ed. J. H. Burns and H. L. A. Hart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 283.

7. Cora Diamond, "The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy," in Stanley Cavell et al., *Philosophy and Animal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 74.

8. Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1, no. 3 (1972): 229–43. The great success of the essay has led Singer to extend the argument into a book-length form, where he poses what is for him the fundamental ethical question. He asks, "Is it possible that by choosing to spend your money on [unneeded commodities] rather than contributing to an aid agency, you are leaving a child to die, a child you could have saved?" Peter Singer, *The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty* (New York: Random House, 2009), 5.

9. For a thoroughgoing critique of the aid agency as such and its inherently counterproductive effects—its tendency, even in the best of cases, to increase immiseration rather than ameliorate it—see Linda Polman, *The Crisis Cara-*

van: What's Wrong with Humanitarian Aid (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010).

10. André Pichot, *The Pure Society: From Darwin to Hitler,* trans. David Fernbach (New York: Verso, 2009), 41.

11. Luc Ferry, *Le Nouvel Ordre écologique: L'arbre, l'animal et l'homme* (Paris: Grasset, 1992), 52.

12. The wound of the signifier may transform the human animal into a wounded animal, but this is a woundedness that it does not share with other animals. In this sense, psychoanalysis challenges the position of Cora Diamond, who sees woundedness as what humans and other animals have in common.

13. To be clear, the rupture that occurs with the emergence of the speaking being has always already occurred. It does not magically happen one day during infancy when a child acquires language. From the beginning, the child is inserted in a signifying structure, even before it gains the capacity to speak or even to breathe.

14. The nature of the lost object is perfectly conveyed by Alfred Hitchcock's anecdote explaining the MacGuffin, the object driving the plot of the suspense film. He tells François Truffaut in an interview, "You may be wondering where the term originated. It might be a Scottish name, taken from a story about two men in a train. One man says, 'What's that package up there in the baggage rack?'

And the other answers, 'Oh, that's a MacGuffin.'

The first one asks, 'What's a MacGuffin?'

'Well,' the other man says, 'it's an apparatus for trapping lions in the Scottish Highlands.'

The first man says, 'But there are no lions in the Scottish Highlands,' and the other one answers, 'Well then, that's no MacGuffin!' So you see that a MacGuffin is actually nothing at all." Alfred Hitchcock, quoted in François Truffaut, *Hitchcock: The Definitive Study of Alfred Hitchcock by François Truffaut,* rev. ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985), 138.

15. Martin Heidegger has his own version of the rupture between the human and the animal. The animal, in Heidegger's formulation, cannot engage beings as such or being as a whole because it lacks the world-forming capacity of the human. In his lecture course *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics,* he asserts that the human is "world-forming" while the animal is "poor in world" (and the stone is "worldless"). Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 177.

16. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis,* trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1978), 167.

17. More than anything else, the resistance of patients to the psychoanalytic cure leads Freud to his most important discovery in 1920—the death drive. Though commentators chalk up this innovation to the experience of World War I or to his daughter's death, it is, as Freud's own account in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* makes clear, the failure of psychoanalysis that leads to this revolution.

18. To put it in Lacan's terms, the subject must come to recognize the symptom as its sinthome—the foundational symptom that organizes the subject's enjoyment and thus cannot be interpreted away.

19. Here, as at other times in his thought, Agamben takes a cue from Hannah Arendt. Arendt sees the reduction of the human subject to its biology as the fundamental danger in contemporary political life. As she puts it in her discussion of violence, "Nothing, in my opinion, could be theoretically more dangerous than the tradition of organic thought in political matters by which power and violence are interpreted in biological terms." Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1969), 75.

20. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life,* trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 9–10.

21. Ibid., 8.

22. Ibid., 26.

23. Ibid., 21

24. As Hegel puts it, "What we are dealing with in logic is not a thinking about something which exists independently as a base for our thinking and apart from it, nor forms which are supposed to provide mere signs or distinguishing marks of truth; on the contrary, the necessary forms and self-determinations of thought are the content and ultimate truth itself." G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic,* trans. A. V. Miller (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1969), 50.

25. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit,* trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 64.

26. Perhaps the most famous instance of signification without an indicated break occurs in the final chapter of James Joyce's *Ulysses,* the monologue of Molly Bloom that occurs in a single sentence that takes up multiple pages. Even here, no one can read the stream of consciousness narration without constructing one's own breaks and thereby damming the stream.

27. Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience,* trans. Liz Heron (New York: Verso, 2007), 7.

28. Ibid.

29. Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End: Notes on Politics,* trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 59.

30. Ibid., 115.

31. Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal,* trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 38.

32. Agamben insists on the structural impossibility of pure or wordless experience per se, the inability to regain experience in its imagined, intensified, pleasurable form. He notes, "The constitution of the subject in and through language is precisely the expropriation of this 'wordless' experience; from the outset, it is always 'speech.' A primary experience, far from being subjective, could then only be what in human beings comes before the subject—that is, before language: a 'wordless' experience in the literal sense of the term, a human *infancy* [*in-fancy*], whose boundary would be marked by language" (Agamben, *Infancy and History,* 54.) What Agamben understands here is the extent

to which the infancy of human subjects and societies is not and cannot be a subjective experience. That is, no one can experience the pleasures of bare life because those pleasures appear only retroactively with the onset of language and the inauguration of something more than life itself.

33. Agamben, *The Open,* 77.

34. Agamben, *Homo Sacer,* 177–78.

35. Ibid., 178. Here, Agamben occupies a notional terrain at the heart of psychoanalysis, seeing how the ontological consistency of desire depends on its dissatisfaction, how the scenarios that constitute our desire must *remain* fantasies else they collapse desire in toto. Agamben suggests as much when he says that "in the classless society or the messianic kingdom, People and people will coincide and there will no longer be, strictly speaking, any people" (ibid.).

36. Whereas Rilke identifies the open with animality, Heidegger sees the animal as captivated in its existence. In *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics,* he says, "Captivation is not some state that accompanies the animal, into which it sometimes temporarily falls, nor is it a state in which it simply finds itself permanently. It is the inner possibility of animal being itself" (239). As Heidegger sees it, Rilke romanticizes animal life and grants it precisely the defining characteristic of human existence—the capacity to attend to things as such, to be open to the world.

37. Rainer Maria Rilke, "The Eighth Elegy," in *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke,* trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Vintage, 1982), 195.

38. Judith Ryan, *Rilke, Modernism and Poetic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 120–21.

39. Rilke, "Eighth Elegy," 197.

40. Rainer Maria Rilke, "The Tenth Elegy," in *Selected Poetry,* 211.

41. Elisabeth de Fontenay, *Le silence des bêtes: La philosophie à l'épreuve de l'animalité* (Paris: Fayard, 1998), 81.

42. As de Fontenay points out, Plato's attitude toward animals is more complex than Aristotle's. In fact, Plato's doctrine of the soul leads him to escape the humanism that traps so many later Western philosophers. De Fontenay claims, "Platonism is not a humanism but a discourse on the soul—namely, a self-propelled movement that is identical in the animal, in the human, and in the god" (ibid., 69). Despite the animal's capacity for having a soul, Plato does nonetheless see animality as a fallen, more sensual state than that of humanity.

43. In *Discourse on the Method,* Descartes analogizes the machine and the animal. He notes that "[animals] have no intelligence at all, and . . . it is nature which acts in them according to the disposition of their organs. In the same way a clock, consisting only of wheels and springs, can count the hours and measure time more accurately than we can with all our wisdom." René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method,* trans. Robert Stoothoff, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes,* vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 141.

44. Tom Regan, *Empty Cages: Facing the Challenge of Animal Rights* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 67. Ironically, it is the subject of the drive as opposed to the instinctual animal that most closely approximates the Energizer Bunny. The animal does not simply keep "going and going" like this

advertising icon. Instead, it goes until it finds its needs satisfied, and then it stops until a need reemerges. In contrast, the subject of the drive goes on uninterruptedly, regardless of the satisfaction of its needs. Perhaps every subject has experienced its capacity for eating past the point where its physical needs have been satisfied. One continues to eat anyway because the food is not a satisfying object but rather a pretext for the satisfaction of the drive.

45. Gary Francione, *Introduction to Animal Rights: Your Child or the Dog?* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 2.

46. In their pointed rejection of Cartesian subjectivity (and philosophy), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari assert the priority of what Descartes denigrates by means of an almost exact inversion. The animal and the machine become sites of liberation in their thought, and subjectivity becomes a repressive trap that one must escape.

47. Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (New York: Verso, 1999), 2.

48. One can see in the history of psychoanalysis the precise retreat from rupture to mastery that occurs in the thought of Descartes. First, Freud discovers the unconscious as the interruption of the subject's self-interested rationality, and subsequently ego psychology affirms the possibility of mastering this interruption.

49. For a filmic depiction of this conception of animality manifesting itself in an animal trial, see Leslie Megahey's *The Advocate* (1993).

50. Lest it seem as if we attribute all the positive benefits of the human exception to rupture and all its nefarious connotations to mastery, there is a fundamental violence involved with rupture itself. This violence, however, is not aggression. The subject performs the violence of rupture on itself in order to effectuate the break from its natural existence. The violence of mastery emerges insofar as the subject tries to avoid this constitutive self-inflicted violence. Sadism is always a species of a primordial masochism that makes the subject what it is.

51. The first great philosopher of rupture, Immanuel Kant, makes the refutation of the ontological proof for the existence of God the center of his philosophical project because the invalidity of the proof attests to the break between appearances and things in themselves. If the proof were valid, we could no longer sustain this distinction. Being would be continuous and could not give rise to appearances as distinct from being itself.

52. René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy,* trans. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 35.

53. Ibid., 49.

54. For Alain Badiou, Singer would be part of the contemporary attempt to strip away the potential for subjectivity and produce pitiable animals in the place of passionate subjects. Badiou writes, "Pity, when it is not the subjective instance of propaganda for 'humanitarian' interventions, is nothing but the confirmation of the naturalism, the deep animality, to which man is reduced by contemporary humanism." Alain Badiou, *The Century,* trans. Alberto Toscano (Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2007), 176.

55. Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation,* updated ed. (New York: Harper, 2009), 9.

56. The very first episode of the remarkable television series *Mad Men,* which chronicles the workings of a Manhattan advertising agency at the beginning of the 1960s, depicts the advertisers confronting the initial findings about the dangers of cigarette smoking. One expert at the agency suggests that they incorporate the Freudian idea of the "death wish" into their advertising, but when the cigarette company executives hear this proposal, they rightly reject it categorically. Such an advertising campaign would fail because the death drive functions unconsciously. When we become aware that we enjoy our own destruction, we most often retreat from that enjoyment.

57. Subjectivity is not necessarily the exclusive property of the human animal. It is certainly possible to imagine an animal or a machine with the capacity to enjoy its suffering. Such an act doesn't even require using one's imagination; it suffices to watch Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), a film in which the only authentic subjects are machines.

58. The carnivore's enjoyment sometimes becomes explicit, as in the case of bumper stickers attacking the refusal to eat meat. One of these reads as follows: "Vegetarian: Indian word for lousy hunter." While it is impossible to deny the humor in this bumper sticker, the humor nicely reveals that meat doesn't provide just nourishment but also enjoyment, an excessive pleasure.

59. We have friends to whom we've offered to loan Jonathan Sarafan Foer's *Eating Animals,* an exposé of the meat industry. The response of each has been remarkably similar. Each has said some form of the following: "I'm not ready to read that book because I'm not ready to become a vegetarian." The statement clearly reveals the knowledge that lurks within the fetishistic disavowal. Even without reading the exact details, everyone knows the story. But as long as the knowledge remains amorphous, one cannot know that one knows.

60. J. M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 64.

61. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power,* trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968), 481.

Conclusion

1. Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), 348.

2. The sharp turn that Žižek's thought took in the direction of Christianity around the year 2000 should be understood as part of his concern for belief as the necessary foundation of any political movement. Many critics have seen this turn as anomalous or regressive, but it fits squarely within the project of restoring the possibility for genuine belief that begins with *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989) and its critique of the cynic's faked disbelief.

3. Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), 206.

4. Kojin Karatani, *Transcritique on Kant and Marx,* trans. Sabu Kohso (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003).

5. Bruno Bosteels, *Alain Badiou, une trajectoire polémique* (Paris: La fabrique, 2009), 173.

6. Catherine Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction,* trans. Carolyn Shread (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 36.

7. Malabou argues that Heidegger's great insight is to locate revolution in the everyday rupture rather than in the dramatic moment envisioned in the future. In *Le change Heidegger,* she notes, "The genius of Heidegger consists in having inscribed the possibility of revolution not in an event to come but in the fact—modest, lesser, so small—*of being-there, of being still there after the accomplishment that doesn't accomplish anything.* . . . Every modification of Dasein . . . has the sense and value of an *overcoming.*" Catherine Malabou, *Le change Heidegger: Du fantastique en philosophie* (Paris: Scheer, 2004), 353–54.

8. At the end of the acknowledgments section of her book, Malabou registers the shock that her thesis must have delivered to her teacher. After thanking Derrida, she writes, "I trust that this book—did he ever see it coming?—will show him the extent of my debt" (Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel,* trans. Lisabeth During [New York: Routledge, 2005], xlviii). Though her final words indicate her debt to Derrida, the question included within the dashes reveals the extent to which Malabou has broken from him, and Derrida's long preface to the book is his attempt to wrestle with this break and its ramifications for his entrenched view of Hegel and metaphysics in general.

9. Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community,* trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

10. As Agamben writes, the oath expresses "the demand, decisive in every sense for the speaking animal, to put its nature at stake in language and to bind together in an ethical and political connection words, things, and actions. Only by this means was it possible for something like a history, distinct from nature and, nevertheless, inseparably intertwined with it, to be produced." Giorgio Agamben, *The Sacrament of Language: An Archaeology of the Oath,* trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 69.

11. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 4.

12. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy,* trans. H. S. Harris and Walter Cerf (Albany: SUNY Press, 1977).

13. To take just a small example, both Badiou and Žižek are regularly accused of anti-Semitism, and critics charge Agamben with eliminating the horrible singularity of the Holocaust because he sees the concentration camp as paradigmatic for modernity.

14. G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right,* trans. T. M. Knox (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 13.

15. If anything, we see how the settling of political meanings amounts to the licensing of a hidden barbarism. After the Asian tsunami of 2004, for instance, the sterling beachfront hotels on the southern Thai island of Phuket were juxtaposed, as if for the first time, with the poor inhabitants of the island's inland towns.

16. See Jonathan Schell, "Pakistan: A Global Flood," *The Nation,* September 13, 2010, 10.

17. Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion,* trans. James Strachey, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* vol. 21 (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), 15.

18. Ibid., 16.

19. Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Holt, 2007), 6.

20. Tom Piazza, *City of Refuge* (New York: HarperPerennial, 2008), 168.

21. Klein, *Shock Doctrine,* 589.

22. Alain Badiou, "Philosophy and Art," in *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return of Philosophy,* trans. and ed. Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens (New York: Continuum, 2004), 73.

23. According to Michele Wucker, "[Trujillo's] protégé, Joaquin Balaguer, wrote that the massacre was 'the crystallization in the heart of our country of a sentiment of protest and defense against four centuries of Haitian depredations.' Grateful for this elegant defense, Trujillo made him, in 1960, the last of three puppet Presidents. Driven into exile after Trujillo's assassination in 1961, Balaguer returned triumphantly, with U.S. support, to the nation's highest office in 1966. During seven presidential terms, Balaguer repeated one pledge above all others: to defend the country from Haitian hordes." Michele Wucker, "Race and Massacre in Hispanola," *Tikkun* (November/December 1998), http://www.tikkun.org/article.php/nov1998_wucker.

24. Jean-Pierre Dupuy proposes an ethics that involves anticipating that one resides in the aftermath of the ultimate catastrophe and living one's life as if that catastrophe will necessarily happen and yet must not happen. He contends that one must "*project oneself* into the post-catastrophe, and see retrospectively in it an event *at once necessary and improbable.*" Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *Pour un catastrophisme éclairé: Quand l'impossible est certain* (Paris: Seuil, 2002), 87.

INDEX