

QUEERING THE WAR DEAD:
VIOLENCE, MOURNING, AND THE POLITICS OF ESTRANGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary practices of grieving those lost to war violence rely heavily on epistemological assumptions about the self and others that often essentialize the identities of both the dead and those mourning. I address the desirability of these identity categories through a critical examination of contemporary practices, interrogating those practices that assert correct and incorrect practices of grieving. Where successful practices will emphasize the heroism and the sacrifice of the war dead, centralizing the role of American values in the act of dying for one's country, to not honor the war dead successfully is seen as a betrayal of their sacrifice and an ethical failure. Demonstrating that the social norms acting as guideposts for processes of mourning over-determine relationships and identities in ways that perpetuate a violence that is seen as redemptive, I argue that we must risk ourselves in ways that surpass the utility of the identity politics surrounding the war dead.

Working towards alternatives to practices that define expectations regarding intelligible forms of grieving those lost to war violence, I argue that a queer relationality can disrupt the idealized constructions of redemptive violence constitutive to notions of successful mourning. A queering of the war dead refuses to allow mourning to be dismissed as unsuccessful if grieving is anything other than the assignment of war hero, patriot, or the solidification of an American identity for those killed by war violence. Ultimately, I argue that acts of queering the war dead have potential to challenge the proliferation of practices that tie a militarized redemptive violence to normalized identities. In doing so, we can begin to explore potential for ridding

ourselves of claims that stratify and separate communities through an identity politics that justify the use of violence and domination in the preservation of those identities.

DEDICATION

For George

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

| | |
|---------|---|
| BLM | Black Lives Matter |
| CD | compact disc |
| CWGC | Commonwealth War Graves Commission |
| DSM | Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders |
| HMMWV | High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle |
| ID | identification |
| IED | Improvised Explosive Device |
| ISIS | Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham |
| MEDEVAC | Medical Evacuation |
| MIA | Missing in Action |
| PTSD | Post Traumatic Stress Disorder |
| SEAL | Sea Air and Land |
| USHMM | United States Holocaust Memorial Museum |
| VA | Veterans Administration |
| WWI | World War One |
| WWII | World War Two |

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INTRODUCTION

This project developed out of two questions: First, is anti-war activism's failure to achieve radical change in those practices that lead to war-related violence in the United States a consequence of current understandings of human subjectivities? Second, can queer theory and a queer relationality offer alternatives to practices that perpetuate war violence? I address these questions through an analysis of the ways in which war violence is mourned and memorialized in the United States and how these practices inform and are informed by subjectivities. Elaborating on what Foucault called an 'ethic of discomfort,' my project here is disrupting the identity politics surrounding war violence in the United States. Whereas most work done in this area seeks to reaffirm essentialized notions of the self, where helping soldiers and communities deal with the effects of war violence consists of shoring up an identity politics, my aim is to refuse those identities and offer the possibilities of new relational modes through personal acts of estrangement.

Contemporary practices of grieving war violence are dependent upon notions of common community, shared values, and similar interests which dictate the terms of relationships for those reconciling death, as well as physical and moral injury, as a result of war. By employing the subversive affect of a Foucauldian 'desire-in-uneasiness' found in the 'becoming of homosexuality', I see possibilities for establishing an estrangement from the excessively rigid and institutionalized relationships to war violence. This estrangement approaches the problems of war violence through social activism in two

strategic ways: first, new ways of relating created by queering those individuals we grieve serves as local forms of resistance to dominant social practices, and second, estrangement presents itself as relational experimentation that confronts the normalization of relationships at the societal level. Ultimately, the estrangement from identities in mourning produced by a queering of contemporary practices might promote better strategies for individual change and for large-scale social change in terms of reducing the proliferation of war-related violence.

Disrupting the Logic of Redemptive Violence

Perhaps the question is this: *What are the possibilities for disrupting the American investment in liberal, redemptive violence and can we find another meaning for the decentering of this narrative within the modern, global hegemony?* These questions are posed after the experience of violence, the violence of war, of a ‘War on Terror’, the violence of a legal and ideological hegemony sustaining itself, has made its way into our everyday experience; an experience of events that can simultaneously constitute themselves as an all encompassing trauma and an aporetic past. Coming from such states of injury gives us the opportunity to reflect upon this injury and to determine the mechanisms of violence, who else suffers, and in what ways.

The persistence of Overseas Contingency Operations — formerly the Global War on Terror — is possible because there is a certain logic of violence and redemption in play. The logic of a redemptive violence delineates heroic violence from barbaric acts, the righteous cause and the evil incarnate. Locating this brand of violence as the motivation for many wars and a great loss of life, my aim here is to politicize this conception of violence and interrogate the effects of this logic in practice. In short, by critiquing technologies of violence and their

rationalities I am interested in a conversation that is concerned with how we have to come to think about violence and what it is.

In recent practice, notions of redemptive violence within many Western democracies have justified and openly advocated for the use of torture, black site detention centers, repressive domestic policies and ever expanding wars made on the vague enemy called terrorism. My aim in this critique of understandings of violence and their practices is to respond to claims of redemptive violence with open spaces — both theoretical and practical — for thinking violence otherwise such that violence and instances of domination are not so easily justified. Towards this goal, I offer a critique of violence that counters all claims to essentialized assumptions regarding universal claims of good or evil, hero or terrorist, and redemptive or barbaric violence. In addressing assumptions between certain understandings of violence and politics, I challenge the unquestioned claims made on the redemptive nature of certain types of violence, instead arguing that violence must always be analyzed as historically contingent practices.

This means going beyond the individuals and the institutions themselves and beyond villainizing the state alone. We must take our critique beyond the sovereign/judicial conception of power and to the forms of rationality themselves. The task, as I see it, is to thoroughly politicize the logic of redemptive violence and the forms of violence that are compatible with contemporary governing rationalities, and to critique the ways in which it is employed and maintained in the liberal political imaginary. In other words, I seek the possibilities for disrupting the liberal investment in redemptive violence through the decentering of liberal subjectivity and conceptions of ethical response-ability.

The project here is an attempt at nuancing the national conversation in a manner that will reflect our ability to decenter the liberal project through the survivor and through the sacrificing individual, the one who believes him or herself to be giving the gift of sacrifice in efforts to further certain conceptions of redemptive and righteous violence and how this is achieved through structures of address and notions of the body and embodiment.

I am writing here not only from my personal perspective and experience, but also from the perspective of a political and social tradition with a history of creating value and meaning in a certain way and from certain conceptual and experiential modes of engaging the world. To fully understand how American cultural production works, we need to understand it from the point of view of those who could be considered its victims as well how it is actualized through perpetuating individuals: how it enters into their formation as acting and deliberating subjects. The threshold for an intelligible response to trauma and violence delineates the domain in which viable actors can operate. So what does this space, the space of intelligible opinion within the public domain, consist of and what is the shape of a response that facilitates viability?

What is allowed to appear in the public sphere is one way to manage reality and it is imperative for the sustainability of a practice that reality is regulated to control not only the content of what people see and hear, but the *ways in which people see and hear*.¹ Cultural production is legitimized not only through the visibility of intelligible practices, but also by what is not there. Those marginalized practices that cannot be shown and those things that cannot be said. It is the American response to violence, to trauma, injury, and death — a political and

¹ My approach here builds on Michel Foucault's notion of 'governmentality' as the 'art of government': a mode of power that concerns itself with maintaining and controlling bodies and persons, control over the production and order of persons and populations, and with the production and reproduction of subjects. See Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 87-104; Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* (New York: Picador, 2003). See also Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

ethical response that has given rise to censorship and that perpetuates its own violence — that I am interested in.

The rhetorical language used by the media and the population generally is indicative of not only the inherent censorship and framing of historical events, but it also puts the ethical disposition of liberal violence out in the open. Terms like “slaughter” and “terrorism” are expressly portrayed as something only a “savage” is capable of. Terrorism itself narrowly defined as an unprompted attack that exists outside the space of formal, sovereign powers and the uniformed, state sanctioned military, the ‘legitimate’ attack being the response of the state made in ‘self-defense’. Moral outrage and issues of public mourning have shaped the discourse surrounding violence and its uses make violence acceptable, if not mandatory, in certain instances. Cultural hegemony is articulated through the consensus of terms such as these, serving as a framework for understanding violence which either prevents or circumvents certain types of issues and questions from being raised while serving as an ethical justification for a politics of redemptive violence.

The reverence for redemptive violence in the U.S. allows us to categorize the decimation of life. Considered legitimate performers of justice (‘a global force for good’ was recently the motto of the U.S. Navy), we are able to shirk responsibility for our own acts of terrorism and atrocity. Through current modes of representation, it has become impossible for us to hear, see, and experience our involvement in violence because the current framework conceptualizing violence requires the nullification of competing claims: we are either an authority that presents itself as a legitimate pursuer of justice acting through a redemptive violence or we are inflicting violence in the same manner as *they* do.

Without the reduction of responsibility to either the individual or the State — and the absolution of neither — I seek to situate individual responsibility within collective, social conditions.² Individuals are not merely the extension of a calculating, mechanistic social force, but are agents with responsibility. It is the focus on the self-generating actions of the individual that has traditionally absolved us from critiquing the world that gave rise to such individuals: the conditions that contribute to the formation of a deliberative process and inform the choices surrounding the viability of violence as an option. This is not a searching for blame but, rather, a rethinking of the relationship between spaces that define acts and the acts themselves with the understanding that we are both acting and being acted upon.

It is the specific claim to a redemptive violence within contemporary practices which presents itself as a solution to violence that I am questioning. Not necessarily in an attempt to expose the falsity of the truths espoused by liberalism, but to critique the consistent manner in which it produces truths, specifically those surrounding violence and trauma. It is a critique of what is made ideologically necessary in/to/via modes of subjectivity. Contesting modern practices, I argue that violence and trauma resist the idealized liberal form of a totalizable world, masterable through self-assertion. My project here formulates an understanding of the contemporary political environment that not only produces such violence, but which incorporates it into its very identity and allows for the expansion of the capacity for the state to reproduce violence.

² My argument builds on a critique of individual agency/autonomy in and against societal norms found, in part, in: Judith Butler, *Prekarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2004); Mark Warren, *Nietzsche and Political Thought* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1988), especially chapters 2 & 5; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), notably Chapter 2.

Response-ability

A ready example of the violence made available and legitimized would be the post-September 11, 2001 ‘War on Terror’ and the now, some fifteen years later, increasing prevalence of war veterans, both in and out of the military. For most, the mention of the war veteran evokes certain images, emotions, and ideals: bravery, sacrifice, duty, and gratitude, just to name a few. The more prevalent discourse surrounding war veterans is one that implies a debt incurred by those the veterans *served* – the community or the nation: “thank you for your service” is a common expression of such indebtedness and gratitude. There has been large-scale reverence towards veterans even when the war itself is being opposed: “support the troops, not the war.” What are the political implications of this reverence, what is this indebtedness, and what, exactly, is owed — if anything — to war veterans and to what the identifier represents?

Part of the reverence for veterans stems from the sacrifices that they make — their time, their family life, their physical and/or mental well-being, or their very lives — and the benefits that we receive (perceived, implied, or otherwise) from such acts. Such indebtedness is seen as the result of benefits received from the sacrifice of others and that this gift demands a responsibility to those who sacrificed. The word ‘benefit’ typically implies a positive notion, the addition of something or something gained. Importantly for what I am attempting to address here is the notion that we benefit from the sacrifice of others because things *didn’t* change. We are able to maintain our way of life, our conceptions of freedoms and liberties, etc. We serve and sacrifice specifically to *preserve* the American project.

When we attempt to reconcile the loss of those killed in war, when we attempt to account for loved ones, friends, and family who are taken from us in such a violent manner, we often try to encapsulate them. To place them into neat and readily recognizable forms, making it easier to

think about them and their place in our lives. She was a mother; he was a brother; she was a *good* person. This heuristic short cutting of a person allows us to make use of them and bring their narrative into our lives. The identity politics involved in mourning those killed in war facilitates such a heuristic, bringing a comfort and stability to our thinking about ourselves and our use of violence on others. The ways we mourn trauma and violence reinforce truths that ‘go without saying,’ affirming assumptions that separate Americans from others, assumptions of a redemptive quality to American violence, and assumptions about the grievability of American lives.

In the United States, there is a right and a wrong way to mourn lives lost to war violence. A successful mourning process incorporates the heroism and sacrifice of the war dead, foregrounding a specifically American brand of virtue that is demonstrated in the act of (ostensibly) dying for American values. To not ascribe the bodies of war dead with the honor demanded when one ‘gives the ultimate gift’ is seen as a betrayal of their sacrifice and as an ethical failure. In this project, I interrogate the relationship between practices of mourning individuals killed by war violence and the politics of representation these practices necessitate.

The ‘successful’ mourning of Americans killed in combat is popularly articulated by practices that concretize a specifically American identity of the war dead which reaffirms notions of a militarized redemptive violence in the preservation of those identities. In other words, I argue that the social norms acting as guideposts for processes of mourning the war dead over-determine relationships and identities in ways that perpetuate violence that is seen as redemptive.

Towards the development of new relational modes, I offer a queering of the war dead in efforts to retheorize the role of failure in mourning and to unwork over-determined identities. Arguing that dominant practices of grieving solidify notions of group interest and national

identity, I see the politics in play as positing American lives as more grievable than non-American lives. The essentialization of American lives over others is the extension of an us/them dichotomy that not only justifies but also expects violence in response to perceived attacks on the American identity. If American lives are more grievable, and so more valuable, then the United States is justified in its use of military campaigns, discriminatory domestic policies, and torture in efforts made to uphold the way American citizens see themselves.

Normalized practices of grieving the war dead suppress a queerness that lies within the presuppositions of those things that ‘go without saying.’ The American public, I argue, has to recreate and reimagine this queerness through practices of mourning those lost to war violence. To engender this estrangement from relational norms in mourning, I offer a queering of the war dead: the application of imaginative relational practices that undo the relationships we currently have with ourselves and with others.

Queering here refers to nonnormative logics and organizations of community, embodiment, and activity.³ What follows is an account of queerness that fosters new relational modes, especially amongst those closest to us; those identities, like American war hero, that we might want to solidify the most. This analysis is important for developing practices that reimagine relationships with the casualties of war that lie outside the logics of heroic and redemptive violence.

A role often assigned to survivors and to those killed in military service is that of ‘hero,’ where the hero is a character, a part to be played, and does not refer to an individual as such. The role of war hero locates ‘hero’ at the heart of one’s personal narrative and the foundation of their identity. Heroes are held in a higher regard in terms of respectability than others and there is a

³ Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 6.

perceived duty-bound obligation to honor them appropriately. Military funerals, for example, are marked by modes of verbal and tactile communications that identify certain bodies as belonging to a certain privileged community and representative of certain ideals.

In articulating a form of resistance, I seek to escape dominant understandings of what relationships in mourning are by retheorizing the role of failure in contemporary practices. By reconsidering what it might mean to ‘fail’ to honor those subjected to war violence in the traditional sense, I argue for the discomfort of a perceived betrayal that takes on the form of subversive relational modes.

To enact failure as intrinsic to the act of mourning itself is not simply the inversion of those dominant practices that see heroes as demanding honor and praise and the betrayal of those expectations as shameful, to simply resignify them, but is to reject the relationality of traditional mourning itself and a refusal of the social positioning that accompanies such practices. Under certain circumstances, the undoing that comes through failing to successfully mourn as the liberal imaginary defines it — the purposive failure of estrangement — might offer more creative and imaginative ways of finding meaning in war death. More specifically, by intentionally failing to honor those service members killed in combat as ‘war heroes’ we can begin to create new affective ties that refuse the violence of the us/them politics that surrounds the label.

The assumption of a politics that separates Americans from others, the assumption of a redemptive quality to American violence, the heroic nature of the American military dead, among others, inform a comfort and a stability in one’s understanding of who and what they are. The intentional failure to uphold these assumptions introduces a critical uncertainty in thinking about our experiences and we create the possibility for new practices.

The alertness of discomfort, what Foucault called its “hyper and pessimistic activism,”⁴ foregrounds the contingent and the singular that are often obfuscated not only in traumatic events, but in the processes of grieving those events as well. To practice grieving as the assertion of selfhood is to maintain identity categories and the epistemological claims that constitute them. If, instead, the practices of identities in mourning can be viewed in their contingency as the *decision* to grieve in certain ways, identities in mourning can become about an undoing rather than an essentialization.

The task is to make intelligible practices appear against a background of potential and deny their necessity. Current practices are far from exhausting all potential and we must ask, following Foucault, “What can be played?”⁵ By making the intelligible and comfortable practices of mourning visible by removing the necessity of concretized identities, we can see the problematic ways in which they operate. In surpassing the utility of the identity politics surrounding mourning, this estrangement from comfort refuses current practices that define expectations regarding intelligible forms of grieving those lost to war violence.

Queering the War Dead

To think of relationality in terms of the comfort of a shared background and common direction is to dictate the terms of relationships, leaving little to no room for creativity and inventiveness. If we think of queerness as the outcome of an estrangement from dominant relational expectations and as imaginative life modes built around the creation of new practices, we can expand queerness beyond a sexual identity and more as a way of life. Estrangement from normalized relationships offers the possibilities of moving beyond the boundaries of traditional

⁴ Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress,” in *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault Vol. 1, Ethics*, edited by Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997), 256.

⁵ Michel Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life,” in *The Essential Works Of Michel Foucault Vol. 1, Ethics*, edited by Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997), 139-40.

relationships and offers a multiplicity of relationships that can be established and invented through new affective ties.

Queer relationalites short-circuit institutional norms and their multitude of roles, rules, and guidelines for life with the multiple intensities, movements, and changing forms that comprise them. Queer relationality privileges estrangement and alienation, and emphasizes the myriad preferences of those involved, prioritizing what is unknown, unassumed, and uncertain about those we relate with. All relationships can be infused with experimentation and, if inventiveness is employed, much of the formality that comprises normalized relationships could be deprived of the appearance of necessity they have attained.

It is queer relationality that I offer as an alternative to the rigid and over-determined relationships currently dominating relationships to war violence. Dominant practices can be disrupted and reoriented through an estrangement of those practices of grieving the war dead that renders understandings of relational ties and communities as sites of comfort. I find potential in the realm of failure: in instances where failing to honor and to maintain is not the pessimism of an overburdened sense of personal responsibility and the shame of being unsuccessful, but rather the opportunity to refuse to participate in the pursuit of success that is demanded of us.

In my interrogation of what constitutes success and failure in contemporary practices, the aim is not to redefine what success is but to demonstrate the ways in which failing at certain tasks can actually produce preferable alternatives. The goal, in other words, is not to simply argue for a reevaluation of what currently constitutes success and failure, but to dismantle the logics of success and failure under which we currently live. Perhaps most obviously, failures allow us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human relations with the goal of delivering us from predictable social expectations.

If the estrangement produced by failure is subversive to dominant cultural practices and a queer failure can resist normative notions of kinship, then the imperative, following Jack Halberstam, is to ‘fail well, fail often, and fail better.’

A queer imaginary associates failure with critiques of ‘successful’ life modes and attempts to ‘fail’ in recreating the homogenizing standards of identities, communities, and relationships that allow it to function. To refuse liberal understandings of community built on narratives of individualized trauma that is successfully repaired, redeemed, or justified by reaffirming identities, grieving the casualties of war needs to be read in terms of those practices and understandings of community, individualism, and success that such grieving highlights.

A queering of the war dead refuses to allow mourning to be dismissed as unsuccessful if grieving is anything other than the assignment of war hero, patriot, or the solidification of an American identity for those casualties of war violence. Queerness lies underneath normalizing practices, an estrangement sitting beneath the surface of those things that ‘go without saying,’ before being dismantled by logics of success. Rather than protesting the presence of queerness with normalizing processes we should use it to disrupt and refuse the idealized constructions of redemptive violence constitutive of successful mourning.

The identity politics that encapsulates war violence is read queer in its reorganization of nationalism and identity and disruption of conventional associations surrounding ‘successfully’ mourned American lives. It is in this moment of public discourse that a queer potentiality can be articulated. In this moment, and so many others that are available in the highly normalized discourse surrounding American veterans and war violence, queerness can be elaborated rather than marginalized. Not as a doubling-down at the level of identity, but queerness as a set of

relational estrangements that refigure certain logics: the facilitation, rather than dismissal, of a queer and subversive affect that disrupts and reorients dominant practices.

Queering our response to violence offers the potential for approaching old problems in new ways. It emphasizes rather than marginalizes the queerness in process of grieving by demonstrating the queerness already within normalized practices. It forces us to look at the norms we invest in, critiques our judgments on the norms of others, and puts our assumptions with naturalized processes front and center. Instead of marginalizing and denying the queerness found in those moments where mourning fails to meet the criteria of a ‘successful’ American, we should embrace it. Queer lives exploit some potential for a difference in *form* that lies dormant as possibility found in the break from dominant life narratives. In these instances we have to recreate and reimagine a queering that can be asserted through practices of mourning those lost to war violence. The transmission of an estrangement from those practices found within the liberal imaginary and the production of a challenge to normalizing practices can be found in the creation of subcultural public spaces.

This “counterpublicity,” to borrow a phrase from José Muñoz, is disseminated through acts that are representational and political interventions in the service of subaltern publics.⁶ Moments where dominant practices collide with those things they are attempting to marginalize, where those things that ‘go without saying’ are brought to the surface, are opportunities for the performance of counterpublicity. When confronted with acts of grieving war violence in ways that reproduce the standards for who and what qualifies as a successful American, we should articulate the queerness that the liberal imaginary attempts to negate. We can resist seeking recuperation into the dominant discourses of ‘successful’ mourning processes through the

⁶ José Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and The Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 147. Emphasis original.

disarticulation of its practices and we can, instead, articulate and proliferate counterpublic spaces.

Acts of queering the war dead develop counterpublic spaces that I see as having potential to challenge the proliferation of a dominant practice that ties a militarized redemptive violence to normalized identities. The counterpublic spaces engendered through practices of queering refuses the publicity of a dominant sphere which fixes images of military service and American identity. In this challenge of dominant discourse, those things that 'go without saying' are brought to the surface and those marginalized groups who are defined as outside of the dominant public sphere intervene with normalized practices. By embracing a queer failure and estrangement we tap into the potential offered by this counterpublicity. The potential for ridding ourselves of claims that stratify and separate communities through an identity politics and justify the use of violence and domination in the preservation of those identities.

CHAPTER ONE:
Betraying Identities in Mourning with an Ethic of Discomfort

One must clearly feel that everything perceived is only evident when surrounded by a familiar and little-known horizon, that each certitude is only sure because of the support offered by unexplored ground. The most fragile instant has roots.

— Foucault, *For an Ethic of Discomfort*

When we attempt to reconcile the loss of those killed in war, when we attempt to account for loved ones, friends, and family who are taken from us in such a violent manner, we often try to encapsulate them. To place them into neat, tidy, and readily recognizable forms, making it easier to think about them and their place in our lives. She was a mother; he was a brother; she was a *good* person ... almost as a heuristic — a short cutting of a person that allows us to make use of them and bring their narrative into our lives. The identity politics involved in mourning those killed in war facilitates these heuristics, bringing a comfort and stability to our thinking about ourselves and our use of violence on others. The ways we mourn trauma and violence reinforce truths that ‘go without saying,’ affirming assumptions that separate Americans from Others, assumptions of a redeeming quality to American violence, and assumptions about the grievability of American lives.

In this chapter I interrogate those assumptions of American identities in mourning that ‘go without saying,’ moving beneath the surface of familiar and comfortable relationships to truth, exposing the problematic nature of current practices of grieving. More specifically, I interrogate practices of mourning that surround American war violence and the relational modes they facilitate. When discursive practices become familiar through processes of normalization, critical reflection is lost and such practices appear comfortable and truthful in their habituation.

It seems imperative to me to challenge the comfort that enables processes of mourning to construct a discursive environment where the violence of selfhood is conflated with practices of grieving. Such a challenge allows us to explore the potential for ridding ourselves of claims that stratify and separate communities through an identity politics and claims that justify the use of violence and domination in the preservation of those identities. In instances of mourning war violence, I ask, “How do practices of mourning American individuals lost to war violence enable the identities of the dead and survivors alike to be essentialized and facilitate identity-reinforcing mechanisms of self-hood?” Drawing on Michel Foucault’s ethic of discomfort, I elaborate such a challenge by interrogating the familiar in processes of mourning and memorializing the war dead. I offer an account of essentializing processes through a critical reading of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the newly rebuilt One World Trade Center in New York, and the social organization Gold Star Mothers. A tension that arises in processes of mourning, especially as they pertain to the war dead, centers on normalizing practices that solidify the identities of both the dead and those mourning and the need for practices that facilitate a becoming. On one hand, technologies that govern practices of grieving determine who the beneficiaries of such acts will be and are actively engaged in producing the norm of who and what is to be mourned; on the other, I argue, we have the need to attend to the foreclosing of possibilities that occurs when currently intelligible options for mourning are essentialized. In short, I see the need to attend to the desirability of identity categories in acts of grieving.

Intelligibility in grieving is the product of recognition as determined by dominant discourse where the desire to be recognized — to be seen as legitimate — means to participate in a certain sets of norms in which recognition is conferred. Because intelligible practices revolve around stable and recognizable identities, participation in essentializing identities is self-

reinforcing. An example of this essentializing practice can be seen in the righteous response within the U.S. to certain forms of violence inflicted upon others abroad while violence suffered at home is mourned as inconceivable. Interpretative frameworks, informed partially by discursive practices of essentializing identities, regulate the moral responses to violence in the U.S. such that we feel more outrage and horror at lives lost under certain conditions than we do under others. September 11, 2001 and the events that followed served to reinforce a cultural narrative that described evil as the product of evil individuals or organizations — such acts were possible because it is “their” very nature. Integral to the redeeming qualities of the actions taken by the U.S. in the War on Terror was the portrayal of the U.S. as the innocent victim, only responding to “pointless and senseless acts of terrorism”¹ in a “struggle for civilization.”² In producing certain understandings of the subject through discursive practices, contemporary norms gain traction precisely because of the way they render “our” destructiveness righteous and “our” destruction unthinkable. This places American lives into one essentialized category and the lives of Others in another.

The Grieving Subject

Important for what I am arguing here is the sociality at the heart of subjectivity, generally, and the norms surrounding processes of grieving, specifically. Dominant discursive practices and traditional ethical theory circle around claims that begin with autonomous and self-sufficient subjects capable of ethical agency to which we can assign responsibility and failure. Instead, starting from the sociality of subjectivity we can, following Judith Butler, see the ways

¹ The attacks of September 11, 2001 were commonly referred to as senseless acts of violence, pointless, among other things. Similar acts of violence and terrorism are still regarded as ‘senseless’: recently, for example, President Obama called the attacks on the U.S. embassy in Libya on September 11, 2012 “senseless violence” (quoted in David Jackson, “Obama: ‘No justification’ for ‘senseless violence’,” *USAToday*, September 12, 2012).

² President Bush quoted in “Bush: Nation in struggle to preserve civilization,” *CNN*, September 12, 2006, accessed January 27, 2014, http://www.cnn.com//2006/US/09/11/bush.memorials/index.html?section=cnn_latest.

in which the first-person perspective assumed by the traditional ethical question becomes disoriented and undone by a fundamental dependency of the ethical sphere on the social. Here, the “I” is not fully formed before entering the social world but, rather, becomes an “I” through the responses of and to others that serve to condition and instantiate notions of self-identity.³

Self-identity, then, is not the basis for morality. It is the exposure to others and the desire for a continual re-opening of self-narratives that informs morality and not the reiterative practices of identity politics that seek a final and complete understanding of the self or of others. In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler argues for an opacity, a constitutive incompleteness, at the center of social narratives that, rather than undermine attempts at morality and accounts of the self, instead make them possible. The demand that I must respond to others in order to justify my actions and to survive lies just beneath the surface of any account I might give of myself in ways that expose the social nature of such an address. It is through the use of language that we are always already entangled with others such that “the very terms by which we give an account, by which we make ourselves intelligible to ourselves and to others, are not of our making.”⁴ The assertion being that it is in thinking of the self as always already interrupted by the other and constituted socially that we can rethink the requirements for moral responsibility.

Selfhood here becomes possible only as a dispossession of the self in our relations to others; it is only in dispossession that I can give accounts of myself. Critical to this project is the understanding that such constitutive sociality is not a problem for ethics, but the very instantiation of relations from which issues can be viewed as ethical. Opacity, not transparency of the self and others, becomes an ethical resource rather than a stumbling block. As such, we can begin to piece together a “new sense of ethics” that can emerge from a “willingness to

³ Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 25. Also, see Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁴ Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 21

acknowledge the limits of acknowledgement itself.”⁵ Butler’s point is that the immediacy of the ways people are present to each other are always mediated by social norms and that the very ways in which people become legible and visible is always already conditioned and framed by norms embedded in language. When language is employed without accounting for its homogenizing effects, labels come to represent specific subjects where identities symbolize the “essence” of a label. Diana Fuss reminds us that the risk of essentializing identities is in the assumption that labels are understood to represent “ontologically stable objects, coherent signs which derive their coherency from their unchangeability and predictability” where “no allowance is made for the historical production of these categories.”⁶

The socialized ways in which we become present to each other — the ways in which we see each other — allows us to ask what we might become, given the production and shifting of norms and the ways in which it constrains what is and is not recognizable, intelligible, and legitimate. We cannot critique practices of grieving by beginning with the assumption that we can actually *see* the other as they are. We must instead begin from the acknowledgment that acts of recognition themselves presuppose structures and norms that hide the contingencies and the singularities of those we are trying to see.

Comfortable Silence And Articulating The Unsayable

Jenny Edkins suggests in *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* that “[t]he Nazis did not attack pre-existing groups of people; they first produced the groups they were then to murder. [certain] Memorials risk doing nothing more than perpetuating the distinctions the Nazis introduced while glossing over the horror of what happened.”⁷ While also reflecting upon nationalist narratives, as they have in the past, contemporary modes of addressing trauma work

⁵ Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 42.

⁶ Diana Fuss, *Speaking Essentially: Feminism, Nature & Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 3.

⁷ Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 135.

in ways that promote further acts of trauma where memory comes not only after wars or acts of violence, but work to claim such acts as justification for militarized responses. In arguing that “remembering ‘the Holocaust’ is not a way of ensuring that genocides do not happen, but of ensuring that, as in Kosovo, they do,”⁸ Edkins is suggesting that many contemporary modes of mourning work in ways that promote prior held distinctions and racisms that legitimize future traumas. Bearing witness to the past has become the ‘never forget’ and ‘never again’ of the present, paving the way for preemptive incursions and the use of force in the future.

If we are to get away from the logic that promotes learning from history in this way, as an exposure to a certain kinds of truth, new ways of ‘remembering’ are needed — that is, new ways of mourning and memorializing those we lose. There are no such neat distinctions as the perpetrators, the victims, the Axis Powers, the Allies, the heroes and the terrorists, us and them, though we use these distinctions to perpetuate acts of violence under the guise of rescue and heroism. What is required are processes of mourning that undo the identities of these prior held distinctions.

Arguably overemphasized and exaggerated in many memorials and museums, the role of the rescuer and the hero call on us to bear witness to a past that we must ensure never happens again. Such practices reassure us that what has happened was indeed in the past and that it shall remain there because we understand it and have corrected for it. Memorials are our way of accounting for events. They are indicators that we understand what an event was, what it meant, and what it means. This nailing down of meaning is also at work when we attribute an event as unimaginable, indescribable, or unsayable. The description of an event as *indescribable* is, in one way, to acknowledge the inadequacy of certain modes of description and representation: this event, in particular was, so traumatic that to retell it would seem impossible, as the event itself is

⁸ Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, 171.

unbelievable. The conclusion that an event is indescribable should not, however, be taken as an excuse for silence.

Such silencing has the effect of burying the trauma of the event rather than hearing the testimony that stems from it and interrogating the ways in which it speaks outside of the memorial space. Restricting the work of mourning to *indescribable*, or to the assertion of a linear narrative and a duty to remembrance, is to maintain a concreteness (i.e. “known,” “understood,” “comprehended”). The pitfalls of such methods of addressing trauma and memory is the ways in which it allows a private grief to come to the surface and to be shown publicly for the occasion of a funeral or participation at a memorial while at the same time maintaining the memorial as a site of accepted immobility. This type of inactivity in the memorial apparatus restricts the process to the four walls of the memorial or the grounds of the camp and ensures that the ‘outside world’ remains as it was. This restriction of trauma and its effects to the ‘moments’ and spaces held at memorials, to a proper time and place, is to freeze the processes of becoming that facilitate mobility and invention. In other words, it essentializes.

In her book *Holocaust Memory Reframed*, Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich addresses the effects of silence and trauma as they are represented in Holocaust museums around the world. Importantly, she interrogates the different messages or narratives museums convey depending on their geographic and cultural context. Focusing her study on Yad Vashem, the Jewish Museum Berlin, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), Hansen-Glucklich links each institution by their attempts to “commemorate extreme trauma in a way resonant with the context culture.”⁹ The author employs ‘civil religion’ as the organizing principle in her

⁹ Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich, *Holocaust Memory Reframed: Museums and the Challenges of Representation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 4.

interrogation of “that which is most holy and sacred in the political culture,”¹⁰ as represented in these national tributes to the Holocaust. Contrasting the three museums, Hansen-Glucklich distinguishes Yad Vashem as a narrative of redemption and Zionism and the Jewish Museum Berlin as built “around a structural absence”¹¹ or a sense of lack. Importantly, in the USHMM’s representation of the Holocaust, the focus is on America’s role as liberator and the redemptive value of American justice.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

The 20th century was marked by the demand for various acts of remembrance in response to atrocities that were/are still occurring all over the globe. The demands to bear witness to these atrocities were, in many instances, oriented towards notions of remembrance and addressing suffering. Alongside many memorials dedicated to such purposes, however, was the image of rescue and redemption that took the form of nationalist and racialized pursuits of memory building. Many memorials and museums dedicated to the Holocaust, for example, are oriented around images of liberation, of the glorious rescue of camp prisoners freed by various States: Britain’s Holocaust Memorial Day is held on January 21, the day Auschwitz was liberated by the Soviet Union in 1945 (the same day also serves as the International Holocaust Remembrance Day); museums the world over are filled with pictures of concentration camps liberated by Allied troops where camp prisoners stand side by side with their rescuers. More recently, September 11, a day of trauma and tragedy, has been named by presidential proclamation as “Patriot Day” and a “National Day of Service and Remembrance” in the U.S.¹² In these examples, certainly among

¹⁰ Hansen-Glucklich, *Holocaust Memory Reframed*, 21.

¹¹ Hansen-Glucklich, *Holocaust Memory Reframed*, 47.

¹² “Presidential Proclamation: Patriot Day and National Day of Service and Remembrance.” 2014. Office of the Press Secretary. September 10. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/10/presidential-proclamation-patriot-day-and-national-day-service-and-remem>

others, we can see how national memory is worked in to and becomes intrinsic to the ways we mourn and memorialize trauma and suffering.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. is, in many ways, an interesting and telling example of this practice. The museum is oriented towards giving visitors a first-hand experience of sorts of what the camp was and offers history as narratives of experiences. You are offered ID cards at the beginning of the permanent exhibition detailing the lives and experiences of men, women, and children living in Europe that are designed to personalize historical events. Each identification card provides a biographical sketch of an individual, describing their personal experience with Nazism in the 1930s and then during the war, concluding with the fate of the individual — that is, the circumstances of the individual’s death or survival.¹³

Designed in attempts at narrating the lives of individuals and of orienting visitors towards the point of view of the victims, the permanent exhibition at the USHMM is constructed of three phases: the first floor is dedicated to the “Nazi Assault -1933 TO 1939,” detailing the American’s response to Nazi persecution and the events leading up to the use of internment camps and the Holocaust; the second stage, “‘Final Solution’—1940 TO 1945” is on the next floor and focuses on the development from the identification and persecution of specific groups to practices of mass murder and the world of the concentration camp; the tour/narrative ends on the final floor with “The Last Chapter,” which emphasizes the liberation of the camps and the Allied victory over Nazi Germany.¹⁴

¹³ “Identification Cards.” 2015a. United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum. <http://www.ushmm.org/remember/id-cards>. Accessed August 20, 2015.

¹⁴ “Permanent Exhibition: The Holocaust.” 2015b. United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum. <http://www.ushmm.org/information/exhibitions/museum-exhibitions/the-holocaust>. Accessed August 20, 2015.

Design orientations such as this are attempts at offering visitors the chance to occupy the role of a Holocaust narrative — to occupy the gaze of an individual’s experience of camps through personal biography and sensory stimulation via recreation of the gas chamber or camp barracks that visitors are taken through. As visitors walk through the memorial museum, holding the identification card offered them upon entrance, they are asked to ‘stand in’ and assume the role of this gaze as passive observer and have their attention and perception directed by the memorial itself — the implication being that this is what people experienced, those who were killed and survivors alike — and the lessons that were learned from it. In the case of the USHMM, part of those ‘lessons learned,’ seemingly portrayed as a conclusive lesson (“The Final Chapter”), comes at the end of the tour/narrative with an elevator ride to the final floor of the memorial. As the elevator ascends you hear the voices of shocked American troops encountering the camps for the first time and, as the doors open, you step out into an entrance filled with pictures of the corpses that met the troops upon their arrival at the camps.

As you near the end of the permanent exhibition, the role you’ve assumed for the duration of your visit — that of gaze occupier and ‘stand in’ — appears in a different form. Whereas previously you were occupying the gaze of the camp experience with the rail cars, the barracks, the gas chambers and crematoriums, here in the concluding section of the memorial you appear as liberator. Exiting the elevator and standing amongst pictures and video of American troops liberating camps, in some instances standing arm in arm with camp survivors, the experience shifts from solemn reflection to one of rescue. The narrative museum, filled with violent images of death and murder, attempts to redeem the process of witnessing (or perhaps reward it) with images of victory and rescue.

A major moral message, building from the “Hall of Witness” entrance of the museum to the final space of the “Hall of Remembrance,” is the affirmation of American values through a detailed experience of an un-American trauma. A trauma that existed on foreign shores, executed and suffered by foreign nations and nationals, the only role in which America had was the liberation of nations and rescue of individuals from such tragedy. In this way, violence appears as evidence of moral strength and validation. This self-righteous affirmation is the danger of this mode of memorialization and the ways in which it serves to promote and perpetuate instances of an historical “them” and an historical “us”. In this way, practices of bearing witness and memorializing continue to serve nationalist/racist pursuits, alongside any work they do on processes of mourning or as the processes themselves.

Hansen-Glucklich’s study of Yad Vashem, the Jewish Museum Berlin, and the USHMM notes an important distinction in narrative between the museums. While Yad Vashem and the Jewish Museum Berlin are applauded for their attempts at resisting direct representations of the Holocaust, the USHMM is criticized for its attempts at very literal recreations of the Holocaust scene. Constructing a narrative by “[h]eaping up the plundered possessions of victims,”¹⁵ and recreating gas chambers and barracks, Hansen-Glucklich faults the USHMM for encouraging visitors to occupy of the victim’s gaze as you proceed through the museum, for encouraging visitors to “imagine what the victims experienced by virtue of the fact that they have walked through” a representation of the Holocaust apparatus.¹⁶ In a problematic way, she asserts, the museum constructs a narrative in which “visitors remember the victims in the very state to which they were reduced by their oppressors.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Hansen-Glucklich, *Holocaust Memory Reframed*, 129.

¹⁶ Hansen-Glucklich, *Holocaust Memory Reframed*, 141.

¹⁷ Hansen-Glucklich, *Holocaust Memory Reframed*, 142.

This means of legitimizing certain traumas brings the promise of future trauma. While this type of memorialization is a working on memory and a means of mourning, it is the type of work being done that needs to come under scrutiny. What are the outcomes of mourning and remembering in this way? When what is lost and remains unknown in the background as victory and righteous violence is brought to the front? The permanence offered up here does not facilitate a continued interrogation of a trauma beyond description but instead delineates groups already identified — the perpetrators, the victims, the rescuers, along with their experiences neatly re-presented in narrative form. This is what it was, this is what it looked like, and this is what it meant.

Identities In Mourning

Identities in mourning are concretized through practices that shore up atomistic understandings of the self. When individuals are killed in war, they are labeled ‘heroes’ and ‘patriots’, among others. Such labels are abstractions from who the individual was and places them in a universalized social role to be performed, even after their death. The role of hero, where death is scripted as sacrifice, seems dismissive in its focus on procedure (‘heroic duty’ and the corresponding reverence for such duty) and not on individuals: the hero is an abstraction and easy interchangeable with other heroes. The soldier is a character, a part to be played. This universalization further obscures the individual we are trying to honor and praise by putting them in a role characterized by stoicism: a silent sacrifice that stifles personal narrative and reinforces not the individual, but the normalized discourse of ‘soldier’ and ‘hero’.

In the realm of politics, the singularity of any one person is not what matters. What matters is that people, generally, exist who can be the object of governance and administration, rather than as individuals with value as such. When it comes to how the U.S. handles military

deaths politically and rhetorically, the individual is represented largely as interchangeable, exchangeable, and substitutable. This characterization of hero, maker of the ultimate sacrifice, and so on, reinforces what Rancière calls a ‘police order’¹⁸ or what Foucault termed ‘biopolitics,’¹⁹ in that it reinforces individuals as objects to be governed and administered. Abstracted social roles make accounting for individual narrative and accounting for a history governable.

In a discussion concerning the role of trauma on history, Heather Love notes in *Feeling Backward* that much of the recent work on trauma, loss, and memory that employs Benjamin’s angel of history portrays the witness as a beaten and passive figure that possesses questionable abilities to participate in the rigorous demands of effecting political change. She suggests that a crucial paradox of political life lies at the heart of this ambivalence: “[a]lthough historical losses instill in us a desire for change, they can also unfit us for the activity of making change. If we look back, we may not be able to pull ourselves away from the spectacle of Sodom in flames.”²⁰

A traumatic past can be a site of overwhelming anxiety and source of fear; it can hinder, if not completely debilitate, us in our attempts to reconcile the past with our lives in the present. One response to this debilitation is a literal call to arms as a protective mechanism intended to shore up identities. We move forward by concretizing the ways we remember trauma, including the ways in which we remember ourselves and each other in it. New York’s World Trade Center was toppled, but resurrected to a symbolic height of 1,776 feet, representing the 1776 birth of the United States as a nation. The act of rebuilding — of grieving — not only replaces the original materially, but exceeds it in its capacity to assert ideas of selfhood and identity. This incitement

¹⁸ Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* (New York: Picador, 2003).

²⁰ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 149.

to act is taken as proof of our capacity to act and the availability of intelligible practices. It is also a demonstration of the perceived effectiveness of our practices as they are taken to exemplify an ability to overcome and move forward with strength and resilience, determination and fortitude.

Put differently, the assertion of violence in the present takes the form of a reproduction of the past in order to secure a future. This ability for past trauma to serve as a call to arms comes from, in part, the enabling and empowering function of normalizing practices. That is, we are not always reduced to the inability to act or respond by normalizing practices, but can be incited to act in new ways. The intensification of normalization over processes of mourning and memorialization leads to an increase in options for mourning: for example, the increased capacity to mourn through new memorials and the proliferation of social organizations that ‘recognize’ and ‘honor’ the heroics and sacrifices made by the military, fire fighters, police, and other public servants.

Similarly, we have become acutely aware of the shortcomings of veteran’s healthcare and the issues surrounding things like PTSD and have taken measures that ensure adequate treatment. The improved technologies of PTSD diagnosis and treatment assign a “severity rating” on a scale of 0 to 4 to military members and veterans to assess their levels of PTSD, as assessed by the twenty symptoms listed in DSM-5,²¹ and where disability compensation is determined by percentage points (e.g. a “60% disability rating”) based off this assessment.²² The intensifications of normalizing practices are visible in these new capacity-expanding, enabling functions.

²¹ See “Clinician-Administered PTSD Scale for DSM-5 (CAPS-5),” United States Department of Veterans Affairs. <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/assessment/adult-int/caps.asp>. Accessed August 27, 2015.

²² See “Veterans Compensation Benefits Rate Tables,” United States Department of Veterans Affairs. http://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/resources_comp01.asp. Accessed August 20, 2015.

Arguing that such capacities are recycled back into modes of normalization, these particular ways of working on the self via mourning are counter-productive in terms of advancing a non-proliferation of violence. The goal, as Foucault puts it, is to develop “the ethos, the practice of self, which would allow these games of power to be played with a minimum of domination.”²³

An Ethic Of Discomfort

Contemporary practices of mourning and memorialization would have us move on from the past and from injury, believing that it is these acts that allow us redemption and reconciliation for our complicity in trauma and violence. These practices facilitate a discursive environment where the violence of selfhood is conflated with processes of mourning by concretizing historical events and securing identities through the fixing of knowledge and truth.

Seeking a way of thinking that escapes the subjugated knowledges and opens itself towards potentialities, Foucault’s critique of the present seeks to find the boundaries of experience in order to transgress them. A genealogical view of history as games of power opens traditional discourses to the contingency of past struggles and the possibility of doing otherwise. The affirmation of contingency is to break with a redemptive approach to history and instead offers the past as potential for being otherwise that seeks to reanimate actions in the present.

To interrogate the limits of intelligibility for identities in mourning we must confront the practices that have become comfortable and truthful through habituation. The task is to interrogate the unknown that lies within the familiar and to facilitate ways of thinking ourselves differently in our experiences of violence. This interrogation of mourning is about distinguishing between those norms and practices that facilitate an undoing of essentialized identities and those

²³ Michel Foucault, “The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom: An Interview with Michel Foucault on January 20, 1984,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* vol. 12 (1987): 129.

norms and practices that seek to legislate and regulate an identity politics. It is in the transgression of a biopolitical self-actualization that we may leave behind historically conditioned identities and affirm subjectivities as potential for being otherwise that resides outside of identity. A means of challenging the comfort of normalization is to employ what Foucault calls an “ethic of discomfort.”

While Foucault’s essay titled “For an Ethic of Discomfort” is, ostensibly, a review of Jean Daniel’s book *L’Ere des Ruptures* [*The Age of Ruptures*], he emphasizes the importance of a ceaseless discomfort with our own presumptions and those moments when things begin to lose their self-evidence. Foucault comments on Merleau-Ponty and what was for him an essential philosophical task: “never to consent to being completely comfortable with one’s own presuppositions ... To be very mindful that everything one perceives is evident only against a familiar and little-known horizon, that every certainty is sure only through the support of a ground that is always unexplored.”²⁴ It is the idea that something can be familiar yet poorly known, and the processes that make the poorly known comfortable, that I see as warranting our attention.

An ethics of discomfort seeks out those familiar yet little-known horizons, creating a space for interrogations that are mindful of old processes and new technologies alike. Foucault asserts a “critical ontology of the self” where his concern is with the refusal to submit to the ‘government of individualization’ by constantly questioning what seems to be natural in one’s own identity and by the ceaseless interrogation of the limits that the present asserts as necessary. This is, of course, Foucault’s read on the Enlightenment itself: “the permanent reactivation of an

²⁴ Michel Foucault, “For an Ethic of Discomfort,” in *The Essential Works Of Michel Foucault Vol. 3, Power*, edited by James Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2001), 448.

attitude — that is, of a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era.”²⁵

Philosophy since Kant has come to mean the work that thought bears on itself in attempts not to reaffirm what one already knows, but instead for the possibilities of thinking differently. Philosophical action, for Foucault, is “entitled to explore what might be changed, in its own thought, through the practice of a knowledge that is foreign to it,”²⁶ where ethical engagement is a perpetual process of self-interrogation aimed at the disruption of what is known with something foreign. The work being done by ethics, then, is taking the self — the familiarity of one’s own identity and the intimacy of self-understanding — and disrupting it. Refusing it. Getting free of oneself.

Such disruptions and refusals contest the self-actualization of prior laws and focus instead on practices of becoming. When one does not accept oneself as one is, subjectivity becomes about the transformation of existence and the site of active contestation of normalizing processes; a point of resistance and a movement towards alternative life-styles with an emphasis on creativity and the (re)creation of the self. For Foucault, the potential to transgress historical conditions of experience goes beyond a critique of current regimes of truth and their respective technologies and into a reformulation of modes of critique themselves, transforming the process of critique into an experimental ethos.

An experimental ethos conceived as “a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an

²⁵ Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” in *The Essential Works Of Michel Foucault Vol. 1: Ethics*, edited by Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997), 312.

²⁶ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure*, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 8-9.

experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.”²⁷ Importantly, the work one does on one’s self is an undefined project that is never finished: askesis is “the work that one performs on oneself in order to transform oneself or make the self appear which, happily, one never attains ... it’s up to us to advance into a homosexual ascesis that would make us work on ourselves and invent — I do not say discover — a manner of being that is still improbable.”²⁸ The objective is to problematize our principles of judgment themselves, to critique contemporary technologies that are taken prior to judgment as subject to judgment. Existence as askesis allows us to detach ourselves from ourselves and from our presuppositions in a critical fashion that compels us towards experimentation with thought, relationships, and forms of living that, in its more radical forms, can free oneself from one’s self as an experience experiment with a non-identity (anonymity) or desubjectification.

An ethics of discomfort advocates the application of an ethos that seeks to unsettle certainties. The goal is not to find unknown facts and make them something known but, rather, to seek out the ways in which the poorly known became poorly known to begin with. Manifest truths don’t disappear when they are replaced by another, newer truth, but when one “begins to detect the very conditions that made it seem manifest: the familiarities that served as its support, the darkneses that brought about its clarity, and all those far-away things that secretly sustained it and made it ‘go without saying.’”²⁹

The aim is to make the comfortable uncomfortable by removing this certitude. Foucault is not claiming that everything is necessarily bad, but “that everything is dangerous, which is not

²⁷ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” in *The Essential Works Of Michel Foucault Vol. 1: Ethics*, edited by Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997), 319.

²⁸ Michel Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life,” in *The Essential Works Of Michel Foucault Vol. 1, Ethics*, edited by Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997), 137.

²⁹ Foucault, “For an Ethic of Discomfort,” 447.

exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism.”³⁰

Rather than seeking an affirmation of what we know, a confirmation of truth, our task when confronting contemporary problems is to employ an approach that can “separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do or think.”³¹ Such critique does not accumulate into a body of knowledge or a dogma but is rather an ethos through which, Foucault asserts, we must “[n]ever consent to be completely comfortable with one’s own presuppositions. Never to let them fall peacefully asleep, but also never to believe that a new fact will suffice to overturn them.”³² We must seek out those moments when certainties are lost, those moments when our certainties are whisked away as so many mistakes we’ve made and clarities are obscured such that the uncertain, unexplored ground becomes the familiar in a way that gives ‘the most fragile instant roots.’

By interrogating those assumptions that ‘go without saying’, we begin to move beneath the surface of familiar and comfortable relationships to truth, exposing the problematic nature of current practices of grieving. The assumption of an identity politics that separates Americans from Others, the assumption of a redemptive quality to American violence, the heroic nature of the American military dead, certainly among others, inform a comfort and a stability in one’s understanding of who and what they are. By introducing an ethos of discomfort, a critical uncertainty, into thinking about our experiences we open the possibility for becoming otherwise. We can explore potential for ridding ourselves of claims that stratify and separate communities

³⁰ Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress,” in *The Essential Works Of Michel Foucault Vol. 1, Ethics*, edited by Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997), 256.

³¹ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” 315-16.

³² Foucault, “For an Ethic of Discomfort,” 448.

through an identity politics and claims that justify the use of violence and domination in the preservation of those identities.

Gold Star Mothers And One World Trade Center

We all live with a bodily vulnerability, with a violence that is the exposure of our vulnerability to others. Although dominant discursive practices in the United States seek to foreclose this vulnerability through the articulation of norms that shore up conceptions of the self through processes of grieving, it can serve another function: that of intensifying this vulnerability. When social practices articulate an intelligibility produced by dominant discursive practices that conflates the violence of selfhood with acts of mourning, the critical question centers on the possibilities for reorganizing these practices.

The desire to grieve in recognizable ways allows for opportunities to interrogate the socially constructed nature of the ways we mourn and the way such practices reinforce ideas of the self and an identity politics. An example of such an identity politics being legitimized by public discourse can be seen through the organization Gold Star Mothers. Gold Star Mothers is a group operating under a federal charter and was founded shortly after WWI. Working under the pretenses of a nonpolitical organization, the significance of the gold star is stated to represent the “honor and glory accorded the person for his supreme sacrifice in offering for his country, the last full measure of devotion and pride of the family in this sacrifice, rather than the sense of personal loss which would be represented by the mourning symbols.”³³

Note here the focus on nationalism, on patriotism and the sense of pride that comes with following state interest, as specifically operating above and beyond any sense of personal or familial loss. The congressional charter that incorporated the organization lists the purposes for

³³ “History.” American Gold Star Mothers. <http://www.goldstarmoms.com/WhoWeAre/History/History.htm>. Accessed August 17, 2015.

which the corporation is organized; naming, among others, to: “perpetuate the memory of those whose lives were sacrificed in our wars;” “maintain true allegiance to the United States of America;” “inculcate lessons of patriotism and love of country;” “inspire respect for the Stars and Stripes in the youth of America;” and “inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, State, and Nation.”³⁴ In other words, a shoring up of the ways we are to understand ourselves.

The Gold Star Mothers has a history of discrimination based on race and citizenship. G. Kurt Piehler writes in his *Remembering War the American Way* that initial pilgrimages to Europe made by gold star mothers to visit the burial sites of their child(ren) were restricted to members only, which at the time meant white women. The African American pilgrims were segregated from the white pilgrims, white women traveling on luxury liners and African American women on commercial steamers.³⁵ More recently, in 2005, the organization refused to grant membership to a non-U.S. citizen. Speaking volumes about the role and execution of violence in and for an American identity, service in the U.S. military is available to non-citizens as a fast-track option for citizenship. Though congressional attention was sought to intervene, the organization worked internally to ultimately amend its constitution to admit non-citizen mothers.³⁶ Practices such as these demonstrate the entangled relationship between military and state norms and their downstream implications for an identity politics that reinforce certain conceptions of the self.

Nationalist claims on the bodies of the war dead and the ways in which we handle our dead is a unique way on conferring significance on certain populations. The ceremony and privileged locations with which we bury our war dead are indicative to the importance we place

³⁴ The Gold Star Mother’s charter is listed under Title 36 of the United States Code, which outlines the role of Patriotic Societies and Observances. List of purposes taken from Gold Star Mother’s website.

³⁵ See G. Kurt Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2004).

³⁶ See Kevin R. Kosar, “Congressional or Federal Charters: Overview and Enduring Issues,” *Congressional Research Service Report for Congress* (April 19, 2013).

on their physical remains as well as their social significance. National cemeteries, where we bury our military dead, have long been used in the U.S. to promote certain conceptions of nationalism, meanings and understandings about the nation, and certain positions regarding duties as a citizen. This can be seen from the very beginning with the first national cemeteries following the Civil War (1862), where social norms were reinforced: the separation of Union and Confederate graves as well as the separation of black and white soldiers.

The location of burial sites and national cemeteries make similar political statements and assertions of moral strength with the burial of Union troops, and the memorials and monuments that went along with the graves, often taking place in Southern ground. Arlington National Cemetery, the nation's largest and most prestigious national cemetery, for example, was located on the family estate of Robert E. Lee, "not as a matter of convenience or happenstance in death, but, rather, an intentional assertion of the nation's interest in honoring the dead, specifically focused on the property of the Confederacy's commander."³⁷ Though there were many Confederate soldiers buried in Arlington, it was considered a Union cemetery and the families of Confederate soldiers were not allowed to decorate or adorn with flowers the graves of their loved ones, some, in extreme instances, were denied access to the cemetery and the graves entirely.³⁸ This practice can be seen more recently and on the global stage with the placement of national cemeteries abroad, most prominently in Europe after WWI and WWII, but collectively in ten

³⁷ Mary L. Clark, "Keep Your Hands Off My (Dead) Body: A Critique of the Ways in Which the State Disrupts the Personhood Interests of the Deceased and His or Her Kin in Disposing of the Dead and Assigning Identity in Death," *Rutgers Law Review* 58 (2005): 54-55.

³⁸ See "Confederate Memorial." Arlington National Cemetery. <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/visitorinformation/MonumentMemorials/Confederate.aspx>. Accessed August 21, 2015.

different countries around the world, interring a total of 124,905 U.S. war dead in twenty-four permanent American burial grounds.³⁹

The placement of our dead is telling of the way we think about the relationship between memory and place, and the way we organize violence into collective memory and social consciousness. Important here is the relationship between memory and place, between identity formation and the everyday landscape, between the intersection of violence and collective memory. It is the everyday environment in which we live our lives, the changed skyline of New York, as one example, that brings the demand for intelligible forms of grieving. Here the New York skyline exists as a space that has been reconfigured to reimagine a time of trauma. The recently finished One World Trade Center skyscraper in Manhattan is a monument to the dead, the architectural reconfiguration of space that enables a play between remembering and forgetting. What is remembered are notions of American selfhood and what is forgotten is the experience of trauma itself. While rising to a symbolic 1,776 feet above ground level, the One World Trade Center building sits on a completely restructured World Trade Center complex. The remnants of the old buildings, the site of trauma, having been completely removed, we could move forward with a clean slate – a fresh start. Integral to the design of the new complex and its main tower was the focus on the future, built in a modern architectural style that differs drastically from the uniform and symmetric twin towers of the past. It attempts to offer a vision of things to come, rather than a focus on the memories of a traumatic past. A space of violence and trauma that has been refigured.

³⁹ See “Cemeteries.” 2015. American Battle Monument Commission. <http://www.abmc.gov/cemeteries/index.php>. Accessed August 21, 2015.

Betraying Identities In Mourning

An ethics of discomfort advocates the application of an ethos that seeks to unsettle certainties. By interrogating those assumptions that ‘go without saying’, we begin to move beneath the surface of familiar and comfortable relationships to truth, exposing the problematic nature of current practices of grieving. The assumption of an identity politics that separates Americans from Others, the assumption of a redemptive quality to American violence, the heroic nature of the American military dead, among others, inform a comfort and a stability in one’s understanding of who and what they are. By introducing an ethos of discomfort, a critical uncertainty, into thinking about our experiences we open the possibility for becoming otherwise.

The alertness of discomfort, what Foucault called its ‘hyper and pessimistic activism,’ foregrounds the contingent and the singular that are often obfuscated not only in traumatic events, but in the processes of grieving those events as well. To practice grieving as the assertion of selfhood is to maintain identity categories and the epistemological claims that constitute them, effectively solidifying and essentializing understandings of identity. If, instead, the practices of identities in mourning can be viewed in their contingency as the decision to grieve in certain ways, identities in mourning can become about an undoing rather than an essentializing. Interrogating the poorly known brings the *decision* to reconcile loss and to account for it in certain ways into view and highlights the potential for the formation of new relational modes.

“We must make the intelligible appear against a background of emptiness and deny its necessity,” Foucault tells us. “We must think that what exists is far from filling all possible spaces. To make a truly unavoidable challenge of the question: What can be played?”⁴⁰ Put into this conversation with identities in mourning, I argue that by making the intelligible and

⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life,” 139-40.

comfortable practices of mourning appear by removing the necessity of concretized identities, we see the problematic ways in which they operate.

Notions of ethical responsibility beginning with the understanding that identity is not the basis for grieving the war dead requires a certain risk: a risk for the individual and a risk for community. A risk that would have us seeking out not the reiterative practices of identity politics in order to find a finalized understanding of the self or of others, but a continual re-opening of narratives and a continual renegotiation of the terms of recognition. An undoing of identity politics, a subjective undoing, becomes of primary importance.

Though this will take on many forms, the risks involved in mourning otherwise, in the *decision* to mourn otherwise needs, I argue, to take on forms that surpass the utility of the contemporary identity politics surrounding mourning. It becomes a *risk* in that one must defy the current practices that define expectations regarding intelligible forms of grieving those lost to war violence (e.g. she was in the military and therefore a hero, so I must mourn her as such and only as such). It is the risk — the threat of which I think plays no small role in essentializing the identities of the dead and those mourning — of *betraying* one's friend or loved one.

The articulation of the social role of hero, among others, has as a constituent part the assumption of the dominant role that being a hero plays in one's personal narrative. It places them in a certain higher regard in terms of respectability and a duty-bound obligation to honor them in kind. The *betrayal* that would accompany somehow not bestowing the war dead and wounded with a hero's honor, in contemporary practices, 'goes without saying.'

To respond with a betrayal as an original act, however, is not the articulation of an ostentatious ethics. To enact betrayal as intrinsic to the act of mourning itself is not simply the inversion of those dominant discursive practices that see heroes as worthy of honor and praise

and their betrayal as shameful, to simply resignify them, but to reject the relationality of traditional mourning itself: A refusal of the social positioning that accompanies contemporary practices. What is needed is the ability to generate unease and discomfort between identities — between those mourning and those being mourned. Betrayal as resignification cannot do this because it can be — and is — easily dismissed in its neat packaging as a binary response to traditional mourning.

A critique of practices that essentialize identities must begin from the acknowledgment that acts of recognition themselves presuppose structures and norms that hide the contingencies and the singularities of those we are trying to see. A response must, then, stem from an understanding of the opaqueness of the self and others, and not from the assumption that we can actually ‘see’ the other as they are. When a response is built on the opaqueness of the other and the impossibility of finding one’s identity in the other, when we begin from an acknowledgment of the impossibility of owning an other in their singularity and alterity, a non-relational (i.e. non-binary) betrayal becomes possible. This betrayal emerges at the point where the sharing of an identity as a common essence is no longer possible.

It is in thinking our experiences of identities in violence and mourning in terms of a non-relational betrayal that those being mourned emerge as separated from one’s self in ways that make shoring up identities an impossibility. A non-relational betrayal that allows us to rethink the requirements for moral responsibility in ways that undo, rather than solidify, identity categories within practices of grieving. Perhaps such a betrayal is precisely what is required to undo the hold that concretized identity has in processes of mourning. Perhaps then we can begin to explore potential for ridding ourselves of claims that stratify and separate communities

through an identity politics and claims that justify the use of violence and domination in the preservation of those identities.

CHAPTER TWO: Pictures of Violence: Wittgenstein and Aspectival Captivity

“But I did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false.” — Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*

Here I wish to address the contemporary Western understanding of the relationships between violence and self-constitution as subject to what Wittgenstein called ‘pictures’ that outlay specific and significant constraints on our ability to self-govern — care for ourselves and for others — and ultimately on modes of freedom and agency. Specifically, I seek to interrogate the dominant ‘picture’ that represents the self as constituted by an inner and outer dualism and the normalizing role the ‘inner/outer self’ picture plays in practices of mourning and memorialization. By analyzing its practices, technologies, and popular representations through which cultural meaning is solidified and transmitted, I examine the ways in which such a picture marginalizes violence as an ethical concern and violence itself is effaced through the way it is (re)presented to us via others and via self-understanding (inner/outer).

Addressing this picture — among many others, certainly — is a pressing ethical matter not only because of the urgency in dealing with matters of crushed bones, spilling blood, and pierced skin — but those, too — but because the ethical marginalization of violence proliferates instances of domination that are seen as unproblematic: imprisonment, dispossession, practices of race and gender, inadequate healthcare, and too many others.

Our identities have been shaped by and through social power relations that condone and necessitate certain violent practices, and contemporary ethical concerns, I assert, necessitate a rethinking of our understandings of the every day practices of violence as they are employed in

our society. Wittgenstein suggests to us in *Philosophical Investigations* that “a *picture* held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably,”¹ where such pictures function as the implicit background of our social practices or as the openly acknowledged limit of what is deemed universal and necessary. For Wittgenstein (and, in different ways towards different ends, Nietzsche and Foucault) the practice of philosophy or of thought is to release us from this captivity and the condition of being unfree, in as far as we are enslaved and entranced by contemporary perspectives and practices. Such pictures of the self are deep rooted in our unquestioned assumptions about the modern world and make it difficult to question or even identify the pictures as such. For Wittgenstein the first task is to make pictures visible as pictures so they can be shown in their contingency; a task made difficult in that language is, for Wittgenstein, the source of pictures. Attempts to resist certain pictures or practices found therein can unintentionally apply the same language and grammar and only serve to reinforce or maintain the object of critique. Wittgenstein and Foucault, then, task us with finding ways of thinking ourselves differently.

This is not to say that all pictures are in-themselves bad and must be countered or done away with — we need pictures of some kind to make the world intelligible. Pictures are an inevitable feature of judgment that typically go unnoticed and fall to the background in that they are learned through cultural habits and practices that are passively assimilated and not learned through overt programs. “We do not learn the practice of making empirical judgments by learning rules,” he tells us, “we are taught *judgments* and their connexion with other judgments. A totality of judgments is made plausible to us. When we first begin to *believe* anything, what

¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1953), § 115, emphasis original.

we believe is not a single proposition, it is a whole system of propositions.”² By inheriting a language, we inherit a system of judgment and perspectives that inform our sense of agency and ideas about self-government: he tells us in §94 of *On Certainty* “But I did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false.”³ The value of any given picture for Wittgenstein is determined by its capacity to orient individuals in the world of judgment and the degree of agency or freedom therein; that is, in a given picture’s capacity to enable us as agents and allow us to make sense of our world and of ourselves in meaningful ways. Being held captive by a linguistic picture, on the other hand, is the becoming entranced by inherited ways of thinking that limit agency and freedom insofar as such pictures are unable to guide judgments in ways that allow us to make sense of world, our actions, and ourselves. The real threat of being held captive by pictures, then, comes from the possibility that, in our captivity, we are unable to critique and revise our practices in ways that would make them meaningful to us.

Wittgenstein and Aspectival Captivity

David Owen, in his “Genealogy as Perspicuous Representation,” points out two senses that could be derived from Wittgenstein’s claim that we might be held captive by a picture. The first, ‘a picture — held us captive,’ suggests a being bound by force as if in captivity; the second, ‘a picture held us — captive,’ suggests a sense of being captivated as if entranced. Both senses, Owen suggests, point to ways of being enthralled with a picture and thus to conditions that obstruct self-government. The first acts upon our ability to perform — our agency — and the second on our capacity to make our own judgments. Owen refers to the way Wittgenstein “draws

² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. G.E.M Anscombe & G.H. von Wright, trans. Denis Paul (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), §140-42. Emphasis original.

³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, § 94.

our attention to the way in which the exercise of our capacity for self-government *qua* agency is blocked by our captivity to a picture because the exercise of our capacity for self-government *qua* judging is obstructed by our captivation by this picture [where] we are enslaved because we are entranced” as what he calls ‘aspectival captivity.’⁴ Necessary to any picture is the foundational judgments that cannot be contested but are, rather, the backdrop against which those things we question revolve. Wittgenstein’s well known metaphorical example from *Culture and Value* is used to illustrate this point: “Someone is *imprisoned* in a room if the door is unlocked, opens inwards; but it doesn’t occur to him to *pull*, rather than push against it.”⁵ Or someone is imprisoned by ways of thinking and understanding the relationship between herself, her body, and violence if no alternative is imaginable. We can push and push against the limits of contemporary practices and technologies with increasing urgency, feelings of powerlessness, and subject to constraints on agency precisely because our technologies and practices are taken as principles of judgment rather than subject to judgment, and we are incapable of calling them into question.

Wittgenstein stresses the importance of being able to evaluate pictures on the basis of the expressibility of our cares and commitments in terms of meaningful understandings of ourselves for self-governance. Owen points to two ‘modes of vulnerability’ through which we become enthralled or captured by pictures: the first is the “forgetting that is an immanent dimension of our habitual activity as language users” where linguistic pictures function as unquestioned backdrops to our everyday practices and; second, is “what one may call a form of philosophical

⁴ David Owen, “Genealogy as Perspicuous Representation,” in *The Grammar of Politics: Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy*, ed. Cressida J. Heyes (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 85.

⁵ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 42e. Emphasis original.

repression,” that is, a picture that functions as a universal or necessary.⁶ The task set before us in freeing ourselves from aspectival captivity is to show the contingency of contemporary modes of understanding, and the extent to which we are able to do so. Our ability to recognize and counter the constraints imposed on us by any particular picture is threatened in a situation where one “thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing’s nature over and over again, and one merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it.”⁷ Wittgenstein asserts that a main source of linguistic failure to understand and address such captivity is a grammatical lack of perspicuity – a clear use of our words. As a way orienting philosophy towards a mode that enables us to free ourselves from pictorial imprisonment, Wittgenstein suggests a “perspicuous representation” which “produces just that understanding which consists in ‘seeing connexions’” and is of “fundamental significance for us. It earmarks the form of account we give, the way we look at things.”⁸

Importantly, Owen points out, aspectival captivity contrasts with another mode of nonphysical constraint on our capacity for self-government — that of ideological captivity. Critiques of ideological captivity (examples ranging from Plato, to Marxist critiques such as those of The Frankfurt School, to Habermas, to name a few) are dependent on the condition of captivation stemming from holding false beliefs about social reality that are to be undone by consciousness-raising efforts that reveal some underlying truth of the matter. The ready examples are assertions of ‘false consciousness’ where certain beliefs are false and do not *accurately* connect up to the world; the solution of course comes in the form of an education or a revealing of the truth, uncovering the metaphorical wool of manipulation and deceit that has been pulled over one’s eyes and exposing the social as it really is in a process of liberation. By

⁶ Owen, “Genealogy as Perspicuous Representation,” 87.

⁷ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §114.

⁸ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §122.

accepting the oppressive institutions of society, if only passively, individuals reproduce and impose on themselves a form of coercion. The importance of contrasting aspectival critique with ideological critique is not to dismiss the latter, both Owen and myself understand the very real pervasiveness and significance of ideological captivity and the necessity of ideological critique. The point is, rather, to highlight the different aspects of self-governance that each addresses. Owen: “the case of ideological captivity calls for a form of self-reflection appropriate to guiding us from error to truth, whereas the case of aspectival captivity calls for a form of self-reflection capable of guiding us to see ourselves differently in a way that enables us to assess the value of the picture in question.”⁹

It is in the form of aspectival critique that the genealogical work of Nietzsche and Foucault can be seen first and foremost as a practice that seeks to free individuals from a given picture seen as the sole possibility, and reorient them towards a self-reflexive and critical process of transvaluation and invention. As we have discussed, the genealogical project entails taking what is considered to be universal and necessary and showing it to be contingent — to show that the object or technology/practice or whatever in question has been otherwise and is the product of arbitrary social constraints. Important to the genealogical critique is not only the being held captive by a picture, but the recognition that such captivity reduces or eliminates our ability to act as agents in the world in ways that are meaningful to us. Nietzsche’s endeavors in *On the Genealogy of Morals* elucidate this point. His concern is that after the death of God, the picture of morality shaped by Christianity has captivated Europeans in a way that no longer allows them to make sense of themselves as moral agents — we have become obscure to ourselves as moral agents insofar as the picture of morality we use as the principle of judgment no longer allows us

⁹ Owen, “Genealogy as Perspicuous Representation,” 90.

to make sense of the world. It is out of our own commitment to making sense of the world that motivates us — and Nietzsche — towards a transvaluation of our moral values.

The genealogical approach is oriented towards freeing ourselves from our selves and from modes subjectivities by demonstrating the contingencies our practices so as to alter the ways in which we see and enact different technologies. By identifying certain practices as captivating and the relations that facilitate such captivation (*Discipline and Punish*, as one example), Foucault seeks to point out the extent of our conditions of domination and seeks to motivate us towards our overcoming such domination through practical tasks that push the limits of subjection and call for modes of subjectivation. By redirecting modes of domination and subjectivity toward experimentation and self-creation, Foucault seeks to minimize the degree of domination within a certain picture. As Owen puts it, “insofar as [the genealogical] account engages with our cares and commitments, it motivates us to engage the practical working out of this reorientation of ourselves as agents.”¹⁰ Wittgenstein, too, is concerned with seeing philosophy and politics as something other than Socratic inquiries seeking permanent answers, something more akin to Foucault’s project of aesthetic self-development. He tells us “working in philosophy — like work in architecture in many respects — is really more a working on oneself. On one’s own interpretation. On one’s way of seeing things. (And what one expects of them).”¹¹

Pictures are held in place partially by our habitual actions and practices, by the seemingly reflexive physical assertions and speech-acts we are all too ready to make in response to our environment. The ways in which we experience ourselves and others, the way we perceive ourselves and represent that self in the world, is realized in shared, embodied practices. In Foucault’s complex analyses of normalization, and all the techniques and processes therein, he

¹⁰ Owen, “Genealogy as Perspicuous Representation,” 95.

¹¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 16e.

explicates the ways in which such technologies are not only restrictive and repressive, but at the same time enabling and individualizing. Every body comes to be measured for its adherence to certain norms and standards — and deviation from those norms — while at the same time is empowered and enabled by the use of norms and standards. In her book *Self-Transformations*, Cressida Heyes refers to the “double effect” of processes of normalization in her study on aesthetics and ethics as seen in practices of sexual reassignment surgery and cosmetic surgery, among others. Referencing Foucault’s work on normalization, Heyes reminds us how normalized bodies increase in institutional efficiency by becoming more adept; that is, by learning new techniques and processes. These new capacities and skills are, however, subject to minute manipulations and the highest levels of scrutiny. New capacities can be enjoyable, exciting, and transformative, she asserts, while at the same time tightening the grip of normalization.

Commenting on the contemporary weight loss culture of beautification through dieting (here referring to contemporary weight loss dieting) and cosmetic surgery, among other practices of normalization, Heyes emphasizes the focus on “failed” bodies — bodies that fail to meet the norm. Iterative failure is intrinsic to many normalizing practices — consider dieting norms, the ‘slender’ body, beautiful/ugly, and so on — where norms and standards are constantly shifting. “Normalization makes liberal use of the self-loathing it promotes, often under the guise of self-improvement. A desperate desire to improve oneself, after all, must be motivated by the belief that one is flawed to begin with. Because normalization works on and through the body, the forms of self-criticism it generates tend also to be focused on the bodies inadequacies, while the very structures that cultivate this psychology also promise to heal it.”¹² “There is, in reality,”

¹² Cressida J. Hayes, *Self-Transformations: Foucault, Ethics, and Normalized Bodies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 121.

Heyes asserts, “no perfection, only failure to achieve it” and yet “acceding to normalizing desires is often the best (and sometimes the only) way to assuage the suffering of the failed body.”¹³

It is my suggestion that understandings of the self as constructed by pictures of violence, reinforced through media, representation, language, and embodied practice, hold us captive; a captivity that goes largely unrecognized and is passed over as subject to judgment in their employment as a principles of judgment. My assertion is that our captivation by the picture of violence we use as reference for social/political relations facilitates forms of domination that are not made known by the picture such that the growth of capabilities (increased abilities to mourn through new memorials or through new social organizations ‘recognizing/honoring’ the heroics/sacrifice of soldiers, proper treatment of PTSD, discursive practices, and so on) is connected to the intensification of power and normalizing technologies. Such pictures of violence undermine our ability to make sense of ourselves and of our world in meaningful ways and stultify our ability for self-creation. The task, then, is to expose these pictures and to facilitate ways of thinking ourselves differently in our experiences of violence. Ways that, rather than undermine, open potentialities for the growing number of technologies and practices that can be separated from the intensification of power and oriented towards our abilities for self-creation.

“For God and country: Geronimo”: Inner/Outer Representation and the Normalization of Mourning

The first picture of violence I want to address here relies on the Western conception of the self as having an inner depth that an outer self – in terms of both the corporeal body and in terms of speech acts — must represent authentically. Contemporary practices of all stripes are continuing to increase their reliance on conceptions of an authentic inner and a consistently mis-

¹³ Hayes, *Self-Transformations*, 121.

represented outer self that structures models of subjectivity which justify technologies of normalization. In the discourse of the inner and the outer, a distinction is made between a conceptually (ontologically) prior inner, which constitutes an a priori truth of the individual. Through working on the self and one's body, such inner truths can be displayed and moments of false- or mis-recognition can be avoided. As Hayes observes, "the transsexual is a man trapped in a woman's body, and must change sex in order for her gendered reality to be visible; the dieter is a moderate, well-disciplined, and hardworking person, whose moral character deserves to be read from her slender form; the recipient of cosmetic surgery is 'beautiful inside' and wants to be received by others as an attractive and desirable individual."¹⁴ Contemporary processes of normalization in many instances (if not the majority) rely on the necessity of an underlying truth to be found within the individual; ready examples of such technologies are the employment of self-discovery and self-help technologies that promise at the same time the transformation of the corporeal body and/or an improved relationship with one's self and allow one to live more 'organically' or 'naturally'.

I seek to theorize the micro-practices of power that make up the day-to-day experience of memorialization and the mourning of trauma and violence and the ways in which the 'inner/outer self' picture of mourning and memorialization conceal the stultifying effects of normalization. Not only does such a picture marginalize violence as an ethical concern, I argue, violence itself is effaced through the way it is (re)presented to us via others and via self-understanding (inner/outer). It is my intention, then, to examine the normalizing role of the 'inner/outer self' picture of mourning and memorialization by analyzing its practices, technologies, and popular representations through which cultural meaning is solidified and transmitted. A central concern of mine here with the concealing powers of normalization is the ways in which individuals

¹⁴ Hayes, *Self-Transformations*, 23.

engage modes of normalization that create the conditions of our subjectivity: that is, the ways in which we demand recognition for ourselves — of certain conceptions of the inner — from inside modes of normalization where such self-understandings are themselves contingent technologies of oppressive power relations. Here, modes of normalization become an ontology of the self, which are then internalized as “identities” to be nurtured and cultivated.

A recent film directed by Clint Eastwood serves as an example of the cultural transmission of such identities, normalizing practices, and technologies of the self. *American Sniper*¹⁵ is the autobiographical story of U.S. Navy SEAL Chris Kyle, a marksman heralded as the deadliest sniper in U.S. history, and his struggle with his commitments to family, war via God and country, and himself. At the beginning of the film, following a scene of the young Kyle family at church, here Chris just a boy of 10 or so — portrayed in the style of the ‘typical’ God fearing, simple, tough and self-reliant American family — the camera opens on the family dining table inside the Kyles’ Texas ranch house. Allusions to the image of American rugged individualism as popularly represented in the Western film genre are not lost here; this is, after all, a film directed by the epitome of self-reliance and American entrepreneurial justice, “Dirty Harry.” (Interestingly enough, in 2012 *Dirty Harry*¹⁶ was selected by the Library of Congress for preservation in the National Film Registry for being “culturally, historically, and aesthetically significant.”) What follows is a lesson in morality, doled out by the patriarch, of course, at the head of the table to the two young boys, Chris and his younger brother Jeff. The father, Wayne:

There are three types of people in this world: sheep, wolves, and sheepdogs. Some people prefer to think that evil doesn’t exist in the world. And if it ever darkened their doorsteps, they wouldn’t know how to protect themselves. Those are the sheep.

[The sound of Wayne’s voice continues over a scene of children circled around two boys fighting on a school playground. The scene shows Jeff being punched repeatedly and then rescued by older brother Chris, who steps in and bloodies the face of the “predator”.]

¹⁵ *American Sniper*, directed by Clint Eastwood (2014; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Studios).

¹⁶ *Dirty Harry*, directed by Don Siegel (1971; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros.).

Then you have predators who use violence to prey on the weak. They're wolves. Then there are those who are blessed with the gift of aggression with an overpowering need to protect the flock. These men are the rare breed who live to confront the wolf. They are the sheep dog.

We are not raising any sheep in this family [here the father removes his belt and slams it on the dining table, posturing aggressively towards his two young children], and I will whoop your ass if you turn into a wolf [the mother, Debbie, attempts to reign in the father with a soft-spoken "Wayne"].

We protect our own. [Turning to the youngest, Jeff] And if someone tries to fight you, [and now back to Chris] or tries to bully your little brother, you have my permission to finish it.

Chris: The guy was picking on Jeff...

Wayne: [looking at Jeff] Is that true?

Jeff: Yes, sir. Yes, he was.

Wayne: [to Chris] Did you finish it?

Eager for his father's approval, Chris nods his head with a scowl, attempting to display for his father just how much of a man he can be. How he can achieve and retain the honorable position of sheepdog. This scene serves as a creation story of sorts and for our purposes here a brief glimpse into the many normalizing technologies and practices that are routinely employed in attempts live up to identities built around conceptions of redemption and honor in violence — of the self as a work to be built around understandings of who 'I' am and of who 'we' are. While this was a cinematic representation undoubtedly with a certain degree of creative license, it was still the biographical representation of a real individual; an identity constructed and cultivated in the U.S. during the latter half of the 20th century and certainly recognizable in popular culture. Central to these identities constructed around understandings of honor, redemption, and mourning — both within the film and without — were the all too familiar discursive practices that trade on dichotomies of God (good)/evil, hero/savage, honor/terrorism in ways demonstrating racism as a perpetuation of violence (and violence as the perpetuation of racism).

Eastwood tells Chris Kyle's story in a very personal manner, highlighting the individual and the relationships he forms with those in battle and with family back home. Bringing a soldier's worldview into detail, we are shown how the extent of their experience can often be

narrowed to the view from a rifle-scope and those in their immediate presence. Those fighting alongside you and those you are fighting against form part of a picture within which we make judgments: for Chris, and his father's morality, this meant seeing all those not standing beside him and fighting with him as "predators" — what they refer to repeatedly in the movie as "savages" (because, of course, he himself is, and therefore those *with him* must be, "sheep dogs"). Within this picture and in a mode very much resembling *ressentiment*, racism becomes a tool utilized not only for staying alive on the battlefield, but for winning the larger, moral victory. But as problematic as the movie itself is — yes, it is racist; yes, it does glamorize violence and idolize those that perpetuate it (those perpetuating *our* violence, that is); yes, it is a platform for the male-centered realm of heroic possibility — but it also *does* something else. Something that can be of use to us: we can explore *American Sniper* and what it is that has made it so successful at the box office with the population at large and with American veteran's associations. Understanding why it is so popular — why it appeals to such a large swath of the American population¹⁷ — will help us understand why so many individuals are attracted to the military, and to celebrating war violence. Who does it appeal to and why? If we want to establish a successful antiwar movement, we must speak not only to the population at large, but it is essential that we engage those actually on the ground, those fighting the wars.

At one point in the film, at the stateside funeral of a SEAL killed in combat, the SEAL's mother is reading aloud a letter he had written before he was killed. The letter pointedly calls in question notions of glory and the relationships between conceptions of glory, war, and warfighters. The mother struggles to read the letter, fighting both tears and what I understood as

¹⁷ The movie also sparked a pissing contest with British viewers as to which nation had the better sniper (See "British Royal Marine is world's deadliest sniper," in *The Telegraph* (February 2, 2015). <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/defence/11383552/British-Royal-Marine-is-worlds-deadliest-sniper.html>; and "This British Versus American Sniper Debate Is a Bizarre Form of Patriotic Dick-Swinging," *Vice* (February 3, 2015). <http://www.vice.com/read/this-british-vs-american-sniper-debate-is-just-patriotic-dick-swinging-309>).

discomfort with what she was reading, as the scene highlights the uncomfortable scenario of a military funeral for a decorated hero who, as he lays in a casket only feet away, is posthumously questioning the very decorations and valorizations he has been given. The mother is cut off as the funeral detail begins playing Taps and the scene moves along, playing a seemingly minor filler-type role in the film, but there is a lot of contextual substance here that speaks to the way we mourn and processes of normalizing recuperation. On the drive home from the funeral Chris' wife, Taya, asks him what he thought of the letter. He responds by blaming the letter for the SEAL's death, saying that it wasn't the ambush that killed him but, rather, "that letter killed Mark. He just, he let go and he paid the price for it." To give credence to the letter and to critically reflect on the words of his friend and teammate would be to question and endanger the war and the values that construct his own identity. If he questioned the 'outer' realm of values and morality, Chris' own 'inner' self — his self-understanding, purpose, direction, and so on — would come under attack in a way that would no longer allow him to maintain the unitary and rigid view of himself as a doer of good; in his protective capacity as sheep dog.

In this way, *American Sniper* does touch upon the ways in which soldiers — and others — who question the war are often suppressed and how their speaking out is brought back into the fold of normalizing practices. Chris employed Mark's death as a deviation from 'what he should have been doing,' implying that if he had his head in the game and wasn't questioning things he would still be alive. He used this way of thinking to reaffirm his own understanding: I am still alive because I have maintained my values and my direction; my self-understanding. Chris Hedge in his book *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* suggests that the conditions of war force to the forefront fundamental questions about the meaning, or meaninglessness, we have given our lives. Here he talks about the appeal of war violence:

The enduring attraction of war is this: Even with its destruction and carnage it can give us what we

long for in life. It can give us purpose, meaning, a reason for living. Only when we are in the midst of conflict does the shallowness and vapidness of much of our lives become apparent. Trivia dominates our conversation and increasingly our airwaves. And war is an enticing elixir. It gives us resolve, a cause. It allows us to be noble. And those who have the least meaning in their lives, [from impoverished refugees to the] legions of young who live in the splendid indolence and safety of the industrialized world, are all susceptible to war's appeal.¹⁸

Similarly, while focusing more on the nature of capitalism and the functions of violence in neoliberal economic markets, Jeff Sparrow in "The Appeal of Violence: Rage Killings in the Neoliberal World," touches on the alienating nature of many contemporary societies. He comments on what he sees as the proliferation of unhappy and alienated individuals as their relationship to meaning and purpose in neoliberal societies:

War presents the traditional values of the left, albeit in an inverted fashion. In combat, soldiers find excitement, meaning, purpose and camaraderie – alongside, of course, brutality, hierarchy, destruction and cruelty. To put it another way, the appeal of violence constitutes an indictment of a peacetime order in which so many people cannot find much worth living for.¹⁹

Understanding that these observations and elaborations are searching for answers from within a picture is important. As biographical narrative, *American Sniper* expounds upon the conflict between the inner and the outer of Chris Kyle; between the actions he and others take in the world and the way he is viewed both by that world and by himself. Importantly for what I am seeking to address it also demonstrates what has become the go-to means of mourning and addressing issues of trauma for much of post-September 11, 2001 America. Reminiscent of a scene from the beginning of the movie, the one just discussed, a situation arises on a deployment to Iraq that puts Wayne's morality into play once again. While conducting a mission in this series of scenes, Chris and his good friend Biggles, who had only recently asked him to be the best man in his upcoming wedding, find themselves on a rooftop in a dense, urban environment taking fire from a sniper on another rooftop some distance off. While on the rooftop exchanging

¹⁸ Chris Hedge, *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), 3-4.

¹⁹ Jeff Sparrow, "The Appeal of Violence: Rage Killings in the Neoliberal World," *Counterpunch*, May 26, 2014, <http://www.counterpunch.org/2014/05/26/rage-killings-in-the-neoliberal-world/>.

fire with the enemy sniper, Biggles is wounded by shrapnel from a round hitting his gear. Chris carries him down from the roof and they, along with the rest of the team, return to base. While later visiting Biggles in the hospital:

Chris: We're gonna wall 'em in and hunt 'em down

Biggles: You don't have to do that

Chris: Oh, we have to do that. You're my brother. And they're gonna fuckin pay for what they did to you.

We are held in suspense as we await his reaction. The list of potential responses being portrayed serve as a number of options or abilities — we have decisions to make when it comes to mourning, we have certain capacities. In what follows, the complex play of forces here is seen as the person Chris wants to be (the inner) and the person Chris is represented by (the outer) come into contact and serve to mutually reinforce each other; that is, Chris' individualism and the choices he can choose from with which to respond, are capacities that are recycled back into modes of normalization. Throughout the duration of the movie, Chris' engagement with this particular enemy sniper constitutes a telling subplot: Chris, who has come to be known in the military community by the moniker "Legend," referring to his high number of confirmed kills, squares off with an adversary worthy of his attention in a very Nietzschean manner. Not only was this enemy sniper highly effective on the battlefield, but he was also an Olympic sharpshooting contender, a accomplishment that fed into Chris' need to prove his own worth and to demonstrate that he could rise to the occasion and best his adversary in competition. This was an integral part in creating the very tangible God (good) vs. evil narrative throughout the film, and the reinforcement of the "sheep dog" standing up and taking on the "predators" of the world and coming out victorious. Near the end of the movie, Chris demonstrates his superior skill (and morality) by shooting the enemy sniper with a heroic, impossible shot from literally a mile away.

Challenging the Inner and the Outer

In different ways both Foucault and Wittgenstein challenge the picture of the inner and the outer: Foucault through the genealogical ‘death of man’, and Wittgenstein through a ‘private language argument’. Recall our discussion of authenticity from the previous chapter and that for Foucault we must not think of ourselves in terms of authentic or inauthentic — we can’t retreat to the woods to discover ourselves as if there was something underneath the rabble of society to ‘discover’. Rather, we are to make ourselves aware of historical limitations placed on the self and on contingent situations (via the genealogical method) and transgress these limits through processes of self-creation and invention. We don’t ‘discover’ ourselves, we invent ourselves. Recall, too, that for Foucault ‘man’ was unknown before the late 1700s and, in *The Order of Things*, asks us to consider what would it mean for science, for thought, for truth, if man as such did not exist? To ask such a question, he tells us, is merely an indulgence in paradox. Paradoxical because we are so “blinded by the recent manifestation of man that we can no longer remember a time — and it is not so long ago — when the world, its order, and human beings existed, but man did not.”²⁰

Wittgenstein, too, makes claims against the epistemological dualism of inner and outer employed by modern philosophy. In *Philosophical Investigations*, after arguing for the captivating nature of pictures, he continues on to discuss specific examples. One such picture that Wittgenstein determined was incoherent was the picture of the self that facilitated the use of a private language. In what has been termed the “private language argument,” Wittgenstein rejects the position that inner states can be validated through ostensive description of or in the external, outer world. That is, essentially for a private language, everyone has a private domain consisting of private objects that no one else could possibly understand or even make reference

²⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 351.

to. One's inner state belongs to oneself alone.²¹ Wittgenstein is concerned here with different functions of language; namely, the expressive and the descriptive. I can descriptively point to objects in a room and note the presence of, say, a friend. I cannot, however, point to and describe my pain. I can articulate that I am in pain ("ouch") or I could grab hold of my elbow and wince, signaling to an observer that I am in pain, but these are to engage in pain behaviors. The dualism of inner and outer here is such that a private inner isolates us from a buffered and independent outer life, and behaviorism denies the inner by prioritizing the outer.

Wittgenstein, of course, attacks the ideas of both private objects and of behaviorism. In his objection to a private language he problematizes the idea of a private pain, arguing that we can't make generalizations (it would be 'irresponsible') about pain if I can only determine what "pain" is from my own, inner experience. He proposes an analogy in in §293 of *Investigations* (emphasis original): "Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a 'beetle'. No one can look into anyone else's box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at *his* beetle." As long as we are only looking into our box, the object is impossible to verify: we could all have different objects or perhaps no object at all, yet the language-game continues to assert the existence of objects (here, beetles). Wittgenstein: "The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a *something*: for the box might even be empty."²² The meaning of a word, then, is not its correspondence with an external object legitimized by intersubjective verification but is rather its employment in language-games. For Wittgenstein, self-understanding and conceptions of the inner only make sense when verified by outward criteria such that "if we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation [as

²¹ See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §243. The "private language argument" has come to be used by many people in many different ways towards many different ends. Wittgenstein discusses it, generally, in §243-315 of *Investigations*.

²² Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §293.

opposed to intellectual description] on the model of ‘object and designation’ the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant.”²³ Pain behaviors only come to make sense in the intersubjective space of discursive practices.

If our capacity for imagining possibilities is determined by our captivity to given picture(s), then understanding these pictures is of the utmost importance. Elaborating on the grip of the concepts of the inner and the outer as entrenched in modern thought, Wittgenstein emphasizes the grammatical construction of these concepts in attempts to move beyond it and make it disappear. He continues his assault in *Investigations* §304 (emphasis original):

‘But you will surely admit that there is a difference between pain-behaviour accompanied by pain and pain-behaviour without any pain?’—Admit it? What greater difference could there be?—‘And yet you again and again reach the conclusion that the sensation itself is a *nothing*.’—Not at all. It is not a *something*, but not a *nothing* either! The conclusion was only that a nothing would serve just as well as a something about which nothing could be said. We only rejected the grammar which tries to force itself on us here.

Wittgenstein refers to the ‘paradox’ in the seemingly contradictory statement “It is not a *something*, but not a *nothing* either!” where the paradox is that there is, in fact, no contradiction at all. In rejecting both private objects and strict behaviorism, Wittgenstein is rejecting both sides of a false dichotomy. To make this paradox disappear, to dissolve the false-dichotomy of an inner and an outer, we must “make a radical break with the idea that language always functions in one way, always serves the same purpose: to convey thoughts—which may be about houses, pains, good and evil, or anything else you please.”²⁴ Wittgenstein highlights contrasting functions of language: the descriptive and intellectual rendering of thoughts, and the expression of one’s affective states, calling on the latter as means of resolving the false-dichotomy of a private inner and a behavioristic outer. What is important for us in our attempts to understand certain practices and forms of life as embedded in and captive to pictures is that we learn the

²³ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §293.

²⁴ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §304.

criteria for such forms of life from discursive practices and the intersubjective practices of/with others. As Heyes puts it: “This grammar of introspection [...] is not inevitable (although many of our current language-games certainly serve to entrench it further and further into our social practices).”²⁵

The grammar of an inner/outer politics works to perpetuate identities and subjectivities such as the “sheep,” “predator,” and “sheep dog” identities of *American Sniper*; identities born from a particular form of life developed according to pictures of violence that justify certain practices and technologies aimed at the body. Technologies that make the nuclear attacks at Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the assassination of Osama bin Laden a cause for national celebration overflowing in to the streets. Technologies that assign a percentage score to military members and veterans to assess their levels of PTSD, where the inner and outer are translated directly into quantifiable data about individuals and populations.

This is a pressing ethical matter not only because of the urgency in dealing with matters of crushed bones, spilling blood, and pierced skin but because the ethical marginalization of violence proliferates instances of domination that are seen as unproblematic: imprisonment, dispossession, practices of race, gender, inadequate healthcare, and too many others. Our identities have been shaped by and through social power relations that condone and necessitate certain violent practices, and contemporary ethical concerns, I assert, necessitate a rethinking of our understandings of the every day practices of violence as they are employed in our society.

Normalization works to simultaneously define particular cases or instances and to homogenize populations. I am arguing that the naturalization of historically contingent conditions as norms is achieved, in part, by the employment of this inner and outer distinction where the outer must be molded and formed in order to authentically represent the inner. It is here

²⁵ Hayes, *Self-Transformations*, 21.

that I seek to address the gripping account of a picture of the self that holds us captive in ways that work to obscure the social and historical contingencies that led to normalizing technologies and to a diminished capacity for self-creation and invention. As Susan Bordo notes, ours is a culture in which “self-starvation, addictive binging and purging, exercise compulsion, and a multi-million dollar industry in corrective surgery are flourishing.” Further, our culture “inclines us away from systemic and historical understanding of these practices and the forms of normalization they serve. Instead, exercise, diet and plastic surgery are continually mystified in commercial constructions of body alteration as self-determination and creative self-fashioning.”²⁶

Many references to Foucault’s work emphasize the repressive/oppressive function of discursive practices and power relations and leave out the enabling/empowering function that comes along with such technologies. Importantly, however, for Foucault, while disciplinary powers certainly pervade technologies of the self and normalizing practices, we are not always reduced to an inability to act or to respond. In fact, the intensification of power relations leads to an increase in abilities and capabilities, something regularly interpreted as the increase in liberal conceptions of freedom or autonomy. One goal, then, in breaking the picture that portrays an increase in abilities or capabilities as an increase in autonomy is to demonstrate a politics still rooted in certain power relations where the effects of bio-power act as supplement to sovereign power.

My aim here is to demonstrate how our perceived ability and capacity to mourn through public and private practices as well as differing memorial apparatus are constituted by complex interactions between power relations and technologies of the self. Such technologies of the self

²⁶ Susan Bordo, “Feminism, Foucault and the Politics of the Body,” in *Reconstructing Foucault: Essays in the Wake of the 80s*, eds. Richardo Miguel-Alfonso and Silvia Capaorale-Bizzini (Atlanta: Rodopi, 1994), 239.

with regard to methods of mourning and grieving injury resulting from war (and other) violence, including the memorials we've erected, are seen as expanding our ability to mourn. In arguing that such capacities are recycled back into modes of normalization, we can see that these particular ways of working on the self are counter-productive in terms of both advancing the non-proliferation of violence and for seeking potentialities for the growing number of technologies and practices that can be separated from the intensification of power and oriented towards our abilities for self-creation.

CHAPTER THREE: The Problematization of Violence

Essentialized understandings of redemptive violence — understandings that delineate heroic violence from barbaric acts, the righteous cause and the evil incarnate — have been at the heart of many wars and a great loss of life in recent decades. In this chapter, I put forth a politicized conception of violence with the aim of problematizing the relationship between contemporary understandings of violence and the implications these understandings have for the execution of violent practices. My focus here is not to engage specific acts of violence, but to prepare the groundwork for such analyses that will come in the following chapters by outlaying a critique of technologies of violence and their rationalities. Foucault is useful in this regard in that he allows me to present a critical ontology of the present where the aim is not to question the essential nature of violence in the human social project, but instead to interrogate how we have to come to think about violence and what it is.

In undoing the essentialized connection between violence and the political, Foucault's account of productive power allows us to challenge the unquestioned claims made on the redemptive nature of certain types of violence, instead arguing that violence must always be analyzed as historically contingent practices. Notions of redemptive violence within many Western democracies have justified and openly advocated for the use of torture, black site detention centers, and ever expanding wars made on the vague enemy terrorism.

My aim in this critique of understandings of violence and their practices is to respond to claims of redemptive violence and open spaces — both theoretical and practical — for thinking

violence otherwise such that violence and instances of domination are not so easily justified.

Towards this goal, I offer a Foucauldian critique of violence that counters all claims to essentialized assumptions regarding universal claims of good or evil, hero or terrorist, and redemptive or barbaric violence.

Ontological Violence

Michel Foucault employs “problematization”¹ as a way of approaching the development of practices, acts, and thoughts and the ways they pose problems for politics; that is, the ways in which “political problems” have been reflected upon and thought about. Foucault is interested in the elaboration of problems that experiences pose in their varied relations to politics because it is the development of certain acts, specific practices, and thoughts that pose certain types of problems for politics. For Foucault, politics alone does not provide any type of definitive solution to the “problems” of madness, sexuality, crime and punishment; there are reasons, of course, for questioning politics but we mustn’t expect politics to answer them completely. This is not to say that the meaning or form of sexuality or criminality or whatever exist apart from or are unaffected by politics, legal structures, and discursive regulations, but only that we cannot expect a politics within such structure where these issues would cease to be problematic. It is a question, then, of thinking about the relations of these different experiences and the problems they pose to politics. If problematization is concerned with the ways things are problematized, the ways they are reflected upon and thought about, it is not concerned with the representation of a preexisting object or the construction of an object through discourse. It is, rather, “the totality of discursive or nondiscursive practices that introduces something into the play of true and false, and

¹ See Michel Foucault, “Introduction,” in *The History of Sexuality Vol. II: The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 1-32; Michel Foucault, “Polemics, Politics and Problematizations,” In *Essential Works of Foucault Vol. I: Ethics*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1998), 111-119; Michel Foucault, “The Concern for Truth,” in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and other Writings 1977-1984*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Routledge, 1990), 255-267.

constitutes it as an object for thought (whether in the form of moral reflection, scientific knowledge, political analysis, etc.).”² In other words, effective problematization is accomplished by thought.

Thought is distinguished from representations and constructions in that it allows us to step away from certain ways of acting and to reflect on what one does as problematic and to question its meaning. Before a domain of action or a behavior can enter in to the field of thought, however, it must first be made uncertain, to be made to lose its familiarity, or to have provoked a certain number of difficulties around it. Instigated by social, economic, or political processes, such disruptions allow thought to intervene and actualize problematization. Such problematization does not assume a unique form that is the direct result or the necessary expression of the social, economic, or political difficulties but is rather an original or specific response which takes many different — and often contradictory — forms.³ Foucault’s work on the history of thought is to “rediscover at the root of these diverse solutions the general form of problematization that has made them possible — even in their very opposition; or what has made possible the transformation of the difficulties and obstacles of a practice into a general problem for which one proposes diverse practical solutions.”⁴ That is, he is concerned with what has made such responses, in all their diversity, possible to begin with. It is this development of the conditions in which possible responses can be given, the turning of a given in to a question, and attempts to see how different solutions to problems have been responses to specific forms of problematization that forms Foucault’s analysis. Defining the obstacles and difficulties that different solutions are attempting to respond to is what constitutes the point of intervention for problematization and the specific work of thought.

² Foucault, “The Concern for Truth,” 257.

³ Foucault, “Polemics, Politics and Problematizations,” 117-18.

⁴ Foucault, “Polemics, Politics and Problematizations,” 118.

It my intention here to interrogate relations of violence and the problems they pose for contemporary politics. More specifically, I seek to look at the practices, acts, and thoughts that inform such relations and the experiences of violence as they interact with an understanding of politics as problem solving. The discussion over the relationship between politics and violence is an old one and the assertions made from Plato forward are well tread in Western political thought. Some, like Plato, Hobbes, Schmitt, and others claim an irreducibility of violence in politics and human affairs generally — ours is largely a political imaginary based on the “recognition” of the human animal as oriented towards the world with certain instinctual dispositions for nastiness and selfishness, among others, certainly. It is the fundamental assumptions about violence and the political that I seek to engage by problematizing it not as nonessential or innate but rather a contingent historical event. Violence is not something that can be defined as a certain form or certain ahistorical mode of behavior but is instead to be understood as embodied practices that are the product of discourses and practices surrounding violence and different relations of power.

To begin we must bracket our discussion of the political and the ontological: while challenging any essentialist claims of human nature with regard to violence (or anything else), I am not positing a deliberative conception of politics a la Rawls, Habermas, etc. I am not pursuing the political as a rational consensus but rather as an agonistic project based on conflict and struggle. These agonistic politics, too, however, derive from ontologies of violence that will need to be addressed. It is my contention that the agonistic nature of politics comes not from an inherent violence found in human nature, but rather from a political reality constructed on exclusion, marginalization, exploitation, disadvantage, and injury.

In bracketing the political and the ontological I am not advocating the separation of the two, as if that were possible, nor am I suggesting we examine ontologies as goods in themselves. Rather, viewing the present as the product of struggles over truth and subjectivities, my aim here is to bring ontological claims made against modernity and their political counterparts to the forefront and view them as politicized assertions. By problematizing the relationship between ontological conceptions and politics, we aren't searching for the correct ontology — the true representation of reality — and arriving at the corresponding deliberative politics. We must instead understand the present ontological assertions of modernity as the effect, the product, of political struggle — as a politicized conception of reality that can be thought of in terms of not *who we are* but rather *what we are*. Ontology is the product of political action rather than its foundation and it to be thought of in terms of its multiple histories and power relations while bound to the historicity of the political. It is my position that ontology as the way the world is presented to us in its material, empirical form and ontology as the way we have come to think about the first-order world are politicized conceptions produced through political struggle.

Rather than disregarding ontological claims as 'wrong' in some sense or as idle philosophical chatter, we must bring such claims into the problematic of violence and see its importance for political action and political thought in the present. Inquiries into the nature of political violence are typically related to objections made against power and/or ruling class(es) as the source of social exclusion, marginalization, and exploitation. An important aspect of such critiques is the location of violence in its relationship to politics. Is violence something internal to politics and therefore a necessary endeavor to be directed and justified, or is violence something outside of the political as something historically contingent and therefore something that can be done away with? Hannah Arendt, for example, argues against the necessity of a

connection between violence and politics and instead offers a critique of violence that asserts its utility.⁵ Violence here is itself devoid of meaning and it is only meaningful in political contexts. In opposition to this, I believe we cannot think of violence as something purely instrumental and external to a rationality but, rather, we must understand violence as something internal to rationality and various forms of power. The project becomes identifying distinct rationalities and their manifestations in forms of violence as the site of contestation.

Here I pursue a Foucauldian critique of violence beginning from a post-humanist position that calls into question all assumptions made about human nature, laws of nature, and all anthropological universals tied to human social interaction. “The first methodological rule” Foucault tells us, is to “circumvent anthropological universals to the greatest extent possible, so as to interrogate them in their historical constitution.”⁶ The task at hand then is not only to describe particular types of violence within a particular historical setting, but to expose the underlying rationality and demonstrate this rationality as something culturally determined and something other than purely instrumental. Foucault tells us:

What is most dangerous about violence is its rationality. Violence itself is certainly terrible. Yet violence finds its deepest anchor and draws its permanence from the very form of rationality that we employ. Some have claimed that, if we lived in a world of reason, we would be able to rid ourselves of violence. This is totally false. Violence and rationality are not incompatible. My problem is not to put reason on trial, but to determine the nature of such rationality that is compatible with violence.⁷

While employing a Foucauldian critique of violence I rely on a normative ideal of violence — while not a derivative of natural or essentialist claims — as objectionable. My aim, then, is not to in some way advance theoretical arguments for nonviolence (which would be a difficult if not impossible task within Foucault’s framework) because I begin from the position

⁵ Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1970).

⁶ Maurice Florence [as asserted by the editor, most likely a pseudonym for Foucault himself], “Foucault, Michel, 1926-,” in *Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 317.

⁷ Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrit II, 1976-1988*, ed. D. Defert and F. Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 803.

that impinging on bodily integrity with physical damage, pain, and suffering is objectionable prior to any philosophical argumentation about possible terms of justification. Important for this discussion of violence as historically contingent is the way we must define violence: if we are to think political reality as the product of ongoing social struggles, then our definition of violence must reflect this contingency as well as its place in the ongoing struggle. For Foucault, life is the relationship of the self to the self and of the self to others as relations of power that are historically contingent and so too, then, is violence as forms of bodily injury. What is important for Foucault, and for my analyses here, is not necessarily what particular form violence takes, but rather what it *does*. That is, what type of subjects contemporary violence produces in terms of our relationship to ourselves and to others, and what forms of power it emboldens and what forms it dismantles.

Violence and politics for Foucault are to be understood in terms of historical subjectivities and in the contingency of embodied practice. Without distinguishing between the political and the social, state institutions and civil society, violence for Foucault is pervasively tied to notions of sovereignty, disciplinary powers, and state governmentalities. Foucault concerns himself with the affective and productive dimensions of different relations of power as they are employed through various violent discourses, practices, and experiences. In *Security, Territory, Population*,⁸ *Society Must Be Defended*,⁹ *The History of Sexuality* vol. I,¹⁰ and in the essay “Governmentality”¹¹ we can see Foucault’s interrogation of the relationship between modes of violence and modes of state and social organization. He is concerned with the violence of the scientifically ordered world, of classification, and administration where “the new sciences,

⁸ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population* (New York: Picador, 2009).

⁹ Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, trans. David Macy (New York: Picador, 2003).

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* vol. I, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

¹¹ Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 87-104.

and the concomitant bourgeois morality, attempt to repress and they oppress; they attempt to order and in so doing they do violence of a particular kind to human bodies and to social relationships.”¹²

My aim here is to critique portrayals of violence as something external and something residing only in a ‘state rationality’ and instead offer an analysis addressing the violence intrinsic to contemporary governmentalities. The concept of governmentality is useful in correcting descriptions of contemporary tactics and strategies of governing and of late capitalism as a simple expansion of the economic into the political by going beyond a theoretical position that takes for granted a separation of the economic and the political, sovereign state institutions and a non-political domain. The socio-political matrix of neoliberal governmentality imposes an ontological framework explaining all human behavior through an economic analysis of cost and benefits, allowing F.A. Hayek to proclaim, “money is one of the greatest instruments of freedom ever invented by man.”¹³ I attempt to challenge this framework by posing theoretical questions about the forms of political violence and the rationality of neoliberal economic policy and practices and the violence inherent therein. It is the contingency of violence that allows us to open a space for critique of what violence is, the ways it is practiced in the present, and it is with an understanding of contemporary strategies of governing that we can explain how we willingly partake in the profound violence that characterizes modern subjectivity and contemporary life.

Originary Violence: Ontological Claims and Historical Practices

In order to address rationalities of violence and their working in contemporary politics, it is necessary to first address differing theoretical treatments of violence in political theory. Here I

¹² Elizabeth Frazer and Kimberly Hutchings, “Avowing Violence: Foucault and Derrida on politics, discourse and meaning,” in *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 37(1): 3-23, 7.

¹³ F.A. Hayek, *The Collected Works of F.A. Hayek, Vol. II: The Road to Serfdom*, ed. Bruce Caldwell (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 125.

undertake an explication of two modes of conceiving the uses of violence in politics and the theoretical connections that are made between politics and violence: ontological claims of the originary violence of language and claims of violence as embodied historical practices. The phrase ‘violence of language’ refers to the claim that language, by necessity, imposes a partial order on thought and thereby constitutes a form of originary violence. It artificially objectifies and orders the world by dividing language — and thought — into signifier and signified. Claims of violence as embodied practices, on the other hand, refer to the physical violence of impacted bodies. Not only referring to smashed bones and severed arteries, but to the marginalization and exploitation of the flesh, as well.

The pervasiveness of ontological commitments in modern thought is well known and exposing such commitments has become one of the primary tasks laid before political theory. In my address of differing ontological treatments of violence in the political, I will employ Foucault as the model for violence as embodied practice. Foucault’s historical nominalism is a form of denaturalizing ontological claims and severing the link between positions asserting universal or natural links between a socioscientific discourse and its referents, arguing that the sexual deviant or the delinquent, for example, are not natural phenomena to be discovered but instead the effect of relations of power and knowledge. For claims made on the level of meaning and the inherent violence of language, I will employ the ready work of Jacques Derrida. The work of the linguistic turn and the associated French (post)structuralism is in demonstrating that reality is not only mediated through and by language, but it is to some extent constituted by it. Language is an ontological imposition where no direct connection between the signifier and the signified exists, making possible various interpretations and solidifying discourse as largely — if not completely — indeterminate, constrained only by the historical contingency of discursive practices.

The differences between the two modes of thinking violence are explicated in the exchange between Foucault and Derrida in their differing interpretations of Descartes' *cogito*: Derrida accuses Foucault of a totalitarian violence to the philosophy of Descartes' *cogito* and Foucault describes Derridean deconstruction as the practice of subjecting texts to the arbitrary power of a sovereign reader. Their dispute highlights the differences between Foucault's advocacy of genealogy, which speaks little of violence or meaning in the abstract but instead focuses on embodied practices and the experience of physical violence as relations of power, and Derrida's deconstruction which emphasizes abstract, originary violence in the context of meaning as an imposition on the political.

While violence is present in discourse for Foucault, he does not position it as constitutive of meaning as such, but rather focuses on the affective and productive nature of violent practices because the relationship between language and violence, he tells us, is historically contingent. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault does discuss discursive practices and the formation of objects, but this is not to be taken as a form of discursive idealism or constructivism. He is not trying to say that language brings things into existence. We sought, he tells us, the unity of a discourse within the objects themselves (discourses on psychology, economics, grammar, etc.), in their distribution, in the interplay of their differences, in their proximity or distance, in what was 'given to the speaking subject' and what we discover is a group of rules that are immanent in a practice. Such forms of analyses became a stable discipline but there should be no misunderstanding, Foucault warns, it is not the object nor its domain that remains constant, but the "relations between the surfaces on which they appear, on which they can be delimited, on which they can be analyzed and specified."¹⁴ What Foucault seeks to do in his analysis of the rules of discourse is not to provide a history of the referent — to reconstitute what madness

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Routledge, 2002), 52.

might have consisted of in a particular period or whether witches were really persecuted mad men and mad women, for example — such histories are no doubt possible. What he is concerned with is not to reach what remains silently anterior to discourse but rather to ‘make it emerge in its own complexity.’ He wants to ‘dispense with things’: “to conjure up their rich, heavy, immediate plenitude, which we usually regard as the primitive law of a discourse that has become divorced from it through error, oblivion, illusion, ignorance, or the inertia of beliefs and traditions” and to “substitute for the enigmatic treasure of ‘things’ anterior to discourse, the regular formation of objects that emerge only in discourse.”¹⁵

In other words, Foucault’s aim was to define objects not through reference to a foundation but by relating objects to the rules that governed a discursive practice and set the historical conditions for their appearance. He sought to challenge empiricism and the dogmatic assumption that our words match up to the world around us — that what we are describing and ordering in our discourse is what we see out in the world. It is not through the object that we can define words, but through discourse (words) that we can define things. Again, this is not a form of discursive constructivism: Foucault is not denying that there is any correspondence between language and the world, he is, rather, problematizing the possibility of pairing up true statements with an objective conception of reality. What is important in this regard is not that he was denying an extra-discursive reality, but that he was denying any sort of natural ordering or hierarchizing of the world that would then pair up with discursive truths. Knowledge is always the effect of practices and the products of power relations. In opposition to Kant’s assertion that the conditions of experience and the conditions of objects of experience were identical Foucault, referencing Nietzsche, tells us that knowledge is something situated between a human nature and a world without any ‘affinity, resemblance, or even natural tie between them.’ The world does

¹⁵ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 52-3.

not follow the form of man so we must be cautious of positing laws of nature and instead understand that “knowledge must struggle against a world without order, without connectedness, without form” and that “there is nothing in knowledge that enables it, by any right whatsoever, to know this world.”¹⁶ In the relationship between knowledge and what knowledge must consist of, there can be only a relation of violence, domination, power, and force: “Knowledge can only be a violation of the things to be known, and not a perception, a recognition, an identification of or with those things.”¹⁷

For Derrida a more originary, fundamental violence occurs with attempts to generate meaning. His interest in violence constitutes part of his larger project of analyzing the conditions of historical possibility; if Foucault is concerned with debunking modernity’s disavowal of violence in its practices, Derrida’s project is to debunk the disavowal of violence in philosophy. Prior to any rule following or enforcement, there is violence being done in the very conceptualization of such rules, in the formulation of the grammatical rules of language. For this reason violence is an inescapable part of language and meaning, as well as a central tenet for any philosophical project or attempts at an ethics.¹⁸ Derrida begins “Force and Signification,” by calling the project of structuralism, as a systematic reduction of the ‘sign’ to underlying social, grammatical, and/or psychological structures, into question. In particular, he is concerned with addressing the structuralist tendency to reduce and under-emphasize the ‘force’ of a work by focusing instead on its form or structural properties. Because the signifier is always in excess,

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, “Truth and Juridical Forms,” in *Essential Works of Foucault Vol. 3: Power*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2001), 9.

¹⁷ Foucault, “Truth and Juridical Forms,” 9.

¹⁸ See Jacques Derrida, “Cogito and the History of Madness,” “Force and Signification,” “Violence and Metaphysics,” found in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978). See also Derrida, “The Violence of the Letter,” in *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

meaning it always contains more meaning than any single intent or use, a writer's intended meaning cannot be contained; this excess is the force of language.

As a byproduct of language's ability to produce signification, force "is the other of language without which language would not be what it is."¹⁹ While structuralism opens new spaces and new avenues to understanding meaning, its search for form without regard for the internal force of language hides as much as it illuminates. It is a kind of violence to a text (and meaning) that is destructive and deconstructing such that it creates a world that is added to the world of the text, separated from force. Structuralism searches only for form and refers only to space, geometric or morphological space, the order of forms: "In this demand for the flat and the and the horizontal, what is intolerable for structuralism is indeed the richness implied by the volume, every element of signification that cannot be spread out into the simultaneity of a form."²⁰ The meaning of meaning for Derrida is its 'infinite implication, the indefinite referral of signifier to signifier' and force is "a certain pure and infinite equivocality which gives signified meaning no respite, no rest, but engages it in its own economy so that it always signifies again and differs" such that a text, that which is written, or meaning itself, is never identical to itself.²¹ Structuralism, while claiming not to be concerned with teleology or notions of finality, orients research and fixes results towards that end. How can structuralism purport to analyze an organized totality like linguistics or biology, Derrida asks us, without at least presuming to know its end: "It is true that the rejection of finalism is a rule, a methodological norm, that

¹⁹ Derrida, "Force and Signification," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 27.

²⁰ Derrida, "Force and Signification," 25.

²¹ Derrida, "Force and Signification," 25.

structuralism can apply only with difficulty. The rejection of finalism is a vow of infidelity to telos which the actual effort can never adhere to.”²²

We can see then the totalitarian nature of attempts at structuring or defining meaning where any attempts at demarcating a space of meaning necessarily restricts in a violent and destructive manner. In a similar way, Derrida argues that Levinas’ ethics of nonviolence necessarily fails in part because of the philosophical language he uses. Levinas’ position of a nonviolent ethics, Derrida surmises in “Violence and Metaphysics,” requires a ‘language without a phrase’ which would be entirely coherent, he tells us, if the face of the other that Levinas employs was only a glance. It is, however, in itself a speech act — a call, a cry of need. There is no phrase, Derrida tells us, “which does not pass through the violence of the concept. Violence appears in *articulation*” where “the very elocution of nonviolent metaphysics is its first disavowal;” further, “every historical language carries within it an irreducible conceptual moment, and therefore a certain violence.”²³ It is here that Derrida also discusses ‘worst’ and ‘least’ violences alongside ideas of first and subsequent violences. While the silence of saying nothing allows the worst violence to proceed, and though the violence of language can be deemed better than this worst violence, the violence of speech is still the imposition of limits through conceptual assertions and is not to be viewed as a non-violent alternative to overt, physical violence.

In “The Violence of the Letter” he addresses the violence of language and writing and the process of violating the ‘proper’ through acts of categorizing and classifying; that is, in the act of naming. Naming, to give names — language in its originary violence — “consists in inscribing within a difference, in classifying, in suspending the vocative absolute” severing “the proper

²² Derrida, “Force and Signification,” 26.

²³ Jacques Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 147-8.

from its property and its self-sameness.”²⁴ In his criticism of Lévi-Strauss’ anthropological work in a Nambikwara village in Brazil, Derrida recalls the game the little girls in the village were playing and the social rules they broke by disclosing their names to Lévi-Strauss, demonstrating the originary violence of naming and the anthropologist’s responsibility for the violence. The act of naming, of splitting the self from itself, a thing from its identity, constitutes a ‘true violence’ in that it is a breach of integrity: “violence appears only at the moment when the intimacy of proper names can be opened to forced entry. And that is possible only at the moment when the space is shaped and reoriented by the glance of the foreigner.”²⁵ In “The Force of Law” Derrida asserts that because of the nature of language “one cannot speak *directly* about justice, thematize or objectivize justice, say ‘this is just’ and even less ‘I am just,’ without immediately betraying justice, if not law (*droit*).”²⁶ He tells us of the inherently violent foundations of law, violent in that it is not and cannot be justified by any preexisting law and as such is an unjustified, self-legitimizing act that he calls the ‘mystical foundations of authority.’ Such violence is, however, required by law in its violation of the integrity of the proper. Any articulation does violence, including the law or attempts at justice, by reducing singularities to the terms of an other.

For Foucault, violence is always felt physically as an embodied experience. The modern world of, classification, administration, and governmentalities oppress and repress through various modes of ordering that do violence to particular bodies in certain social positions. Modern violence is that which it disavows through its repression, and represents itself to itself as a pacific mode of ordering but, however, “this alleged pacifism, or the superficial appearance of

²⁴ Jacques Derrida, “The Violence of the Letter,” in *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 112.

²⁵ Derrida, “The Violence of the Letter,” 113.

²⁶ Jacques Derrida, “The Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority’,” in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld, & David Gray Carlson (New York: Routledge, 1992), 10. Emphasis original.

it, is possible only because of the violence of discipline, treatment, and classification and administration.”²⁷ With scientific ordering and the concurrent governmentalities, the biological came under state control which then possessed the power ‘to make live or let die’ applied not to individual bodies as a form of disciplinary power, but as a non-disciplinary power to ‘man-as-species.’²⁸ In *Society Must Be Defended* Foucault discusses the emergence of discourses on war and politics based on assertions of race that go against the principles of traditional sovereign power. I will elaborate on this in more detail later, but what is important here is that Foucault emphasizes a transition from group dynamics that challenge sovereignty to a group dynamic that becomes part of sovereign power. In his well-known play on Clausewitz’s dictum, Foucault asserts that politics is war by other means where war no longer refers to the destruction of political opponents, but instead to an enemy race. In this way, he shows new forms of power that amplify and facilitate state power and violence.

Derrida is not necessarily interested in specific practices or truth effects as the products of regimes of truth because resistance to violence does not come from the identification of historical forms of power and its associated practices, but through the acknowledgment and avowal of the groundlessness of one’s own claims to authority and implications of imposing such claims on others. The practices of historical violences are always preconditioned by a more fundamental, originary violence. Derrida allows for differing forms of violent practices in different social and historical contexts, but the fundamental structure of violence does not change in any way — it all falls under the condition of arche-violence as the condition for history as such.

Foucault on the other hand emphasizes the historical contingency of violent practices and their specific manifestations in order to engage the effects of such practices and the subjects they

²⁷ Frazer and Hutchings, “Avowing Violence,” 7.

²⁸ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 240-242.

produce. Violence is part of the world and as such it is as historically contingent as the relationship of the self to the self and the self to others. It is the productive powers of violence that concerns me here — what violence does in its productive capacity and the concrete historical practices through which it is actualized and not what it is in any transhistorical sense.

Arendt, Agamben, and Foucault: Violence and the (Bio)Political

It is the insistence on man as the political animal that separates us from other species and that which has defined us in our abilities and capacities for social interaction through various social and philosophical theories. While, at one level, human biological life faces the struggle to survive the elements, each other, and other species in the same way as any other living creature, a defining feature of Western thought has been the separation of the political from biological. Some contemporary lines of political thought, however, assert the defining moment of modernity is the erasure of demarcated spaces labeled ‘political’ and ‘biological’, such that the effect of modern politics is not the exclusion of the biological from the political, but rather its subsumption. The claim of modernity, for some, means rethinking the ontological status of the relationship between the biological and the political that has pervaded the Western political tradition for so many centuries.

In order to approach the relationship between violence and politics, I would here like to open a dialogue between three thinkers and their respective positions on violence, the political, and the biological: Arendt, Agamben, and Foucault all describe the conflation of *pure life* and the political life, albeit in substantially different ways that lead them to address the perceived issue in different manners. My aim here is to, however briefly, explicate different understandings of the relationship between violence and the political so as to better understand modern rationalities concerning (governmental) violence. By bringing Arendt, Agamben, and Foucault

into conversation with each other, I will elaborate my methodological approach by threading through different conceptualizations of violence and what each author adds to the discussion. In addressing their respective problematizations of violence, we can build on the language used to define the problem and the approaches offered in turn, building through each author towards a fuller understanding of the ways that violence functions in contemporary practice.

Earlier I mentioned Arendt's conception of the utility of violence, so I will begin by further elaborating upon her critique. In particular, I am concerned here with Arendt's conception of "the rise of the social" and its implications for the role of violence and the organization of biological and political life.²⁹ For Arendt, "the social" consists of a realm that is neither strictly public nor private but rather a conflation of the two that concerns itself with the social administration of private, biological life. A realm where the emergence of society "— the rise of housekeeping, its activities, problems, and organizational devices — from the shadowy interior of the household into the light of the public sphere, has not only blurred the old borderline between private and political, it has also changed almost beyond recognition the meaning of the two terms and their significance for the life of the individual and the citizen."³⁰ The crises of modernity, for Arendt, is the emergence and takeover of the concerns for private, biological life into the public realm where modern society exists as "the form in which the fact of mutual dependence for the sake of life and nothing else assumes public significance and where the activities connected with sheer survival are permitted to appear in public."³¹ The public organization of life processes has placed life itself at the pinnacle of political achievements in a sense that is not properly *political* at all for Arendt.

²⁹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

³⁰ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 38.

³¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 46.

Arendt sees modernity as consisting of the elision of political freedom in part through a tripartite organizational composition surrounding ideas of labor, work, and action. In *The Human Condition*, she outlines a hierarchical schema of these activities and their role in shaping modern society, emphasizing the role labor has come to play as a central human pursuit. Labor is that which maintains the biological needs of bare human existence — the maintenance of life itself. In a mode that Arendt refers to as *animal laborans*, the human activity of labor is commanded by necessity and is defined by its never-ending nature and is that human characteristic which most closely resembles that of (other) animals. Most importantly, in its mandated nature, labor is characterized by its distinct lack of freedom. Rather than placing it as a properly political pursuit (*polis*), Arendt places labor and matters like the economic squarely in the private domain of the household (*oikos*). The emergence of labor into the public sphere has the effect of diluting and ultimately destroying the polis — the realm that should be concerning itself with the higher pursuits of human freedoms and not with concerns for mere human biological needs. The proliferation of capitalism and economic individualism that have centered the private sphere in the public domain have all but assured an end to the properly political concerns of the *polis*, which are pursuit of higher ends and higher human endeavors.

It is the world of *homo faber* — the world of work, of the creation of durable goods that exists beyond their immediate necessity, a world distinct from nature in its durability and independence from the human activities that bring it into being — that is at stake with the rise of the social. With labor as the focal point of the modern world, we are incapable of cultivating a society aimed higher pursuits because of the very nature of labor: labor is intrinsically perishable and short-lived, existing only for immediate consumption. As such, societies organized around labor do not possess the durable qualities needed in order to establish a common culture over time

and where the qualities characteristic of the “world of fabrication — the permanence, stability, durability — as well as those characteristics of the world of action and speech — freedom, plurality, solidarity — are sacrificed in favor of the values of life, productivity, and abundance.”³²

Rooting her critique of modernity from the viewpoint of the Greeks, Arendt emphasizes the distinctions between the public and the private realms, the *polis* from the *oikos*. More specifically, she emphasizes the manner in which, for the Greeks, the biological aspects of life were relegated to the private, household sphere and not the domain of public contestation. The public realm is the realm of speech and, in particular, the realm of persuasion: “to be political, to live in a *polis*, meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence.”³³ To force people through violence on the other hand, Arendt tells us, “to command rather than persuade, were *prepolitical* ways to deal with people characteristic of life outside the *polis*, of home and family, where the household head ruled with uncontested, despotic powers...”³⁴ Following Arendt’s hierarchical organization of human activity, then, force and violence are distinctly pre-political methods belonging to the necessary activity of labor — that is, to biological life. She frees the realm of the political — the realm of higher pursuits, speech and action — from the necessary violence of survival by severing it from the human body and from biological necessity. In this way, Arendt can argue against a necessary connection between violence and politics and can attribute the violence found in modernity to the rise of the social over the political: the violence of biological survival has made its way into the realm of the political.

³² Maurizio Passerin d’Entrèves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt* (London: Routledge, 1994), 5.

³³ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 26.

³⁴ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 27, emphasis mine.

From this view of the relationship between labor and work, the social and the political, Arendt readily criticizes Marx for his emphasis of the economic and the conflation of necessary labor with the inherent urges of the life process. By addressing the issue in terms of a liberation of these life processes as ‘the iron laws of historical necessity’ from scarcity, Marx made the revolution about biological abundance and not about the liberation of man from the oppression of other men. That is, about *social* and not *political* freedom. In this way, the ‘social question’ for Arendt has become “the politically most pernicious doctrine of the modern age, namely that life is the highest good, and that the life process of society is the very centre of human endeavor.”³⁵ By delineating the political from the social and by relegating violence to the latter alone, Arendt attempts to maintain the political as the realm of power separate from the violence of biological need and constituted only by deliberation and the communal speech, action, and participation of citizens. Violence is not to be viewed as a supreme form of power, but rather always in its instrumentality in the role it plays in politics as a means to a political end, but not a political end in itself. The sanctity of the political must be maintained if it is to be the realm of public action and speech, of social deliberation and agonistic — yet distinctly nonviolent — cooperation.

While Giorgio Agamben would agree with Arendt that Modern politics is concerned more and more with the management of biological life, he would disagree with the formulation of the problem as Arendt defines it and the solutions that she provides as well. Rather than attempting to restore some quasi-Classical political hierarchy and subverting violence from politics, Agamben places the notion of biopower squarely in the realm of the political as a mode of originary violence. For Agamben, as for Arendt, Modern political thought differs from Classical Greek thought in that “modern democracy presents itself from the beginning as a vindication and liberation of *zoē*, and that it is constantly trying to transform its own bare life

³⁵ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 54.

into a way of life and to find, so to speak, the *bios* of *zoē*,” the effect of which is the blurring of the lines between *bios* and *zoē* such that bare life “frees itself in the city and becomes both subject and object of the conflicts of the political order.”³⁶ Politics today “knows no value (and, consequently, no nonvalue) other than life.”³⁷

He differs from Arendt, crucially, by maintaining that biological life has always been at the core of politics as well as a political objective. He maintains the disparate categories of biological life and political life asserted by Aristotle and other Ancients, where the political was not intended to perpetuate the biological but to serve the higher human pursuits of justice, freedom, ethics, etc. Unlike Arendt’s clearly demarcated categories, however, the line between the biological and the political was never something set in stone. For Agamben, the exclusion of bare life from the political is to be understood by what he calls the ‘inclusive exclusion,’ that the very act of excluding the biological is what founds community in the political. This inclusive exclusion here is a relationship of exception for Agamben, whereby something is included through its very exclusion. The modern political concern for the biological demonstrates the very relationship of exception and the bond between the biological and the political — bare life and sovereign power. In politicizing bare life, Western political thought maintains a metaphysical tradition not of the dichotomous friend/enemy distinction, “but that of bare life/political existence, *zoē/bios*, exclusion/inclusion”³⁸ where “there is politics because man is the living being who, in language, separates and opposes himself to his own bare life and, at the same time,

³⁶ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 9.

³⁷ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 10.

³⁸ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 8.

maintains himself in relation to that bare life in an inclusive exclusion.”³⁹ If politics is what bare, biological life is not, it must continually exact its exclusion to maintain itself.

The relationship between violence and the political, for Agamben, lies in the inclusive exclusions made by the sovereign with regard to bare life. There exists a fundamental bond between the sovereign and bare life that forms a foundational and originary bond of the political, the implications being that political power cannot be severed from violence because of political power’s link to the sovereign’s ability to demarcate the realm of bare life. Agamben’s conception of sovereignty is derived from Schmitt and identifies the sovereign as the entity that determines a state of exception.⁴⁰ The sovereign must have the power to determine when the normal juridical system is to operate and when it is no longer valid and a state of exception is needed. Importantly, by defining the demarcation point between normal, legal and non- or extra-legal circumstances, the sovereign circumscribes the spheres of both. By defining the exception as specifically outside the law, the sovereign delineates what is inside the law and how and when it is to operate.

Again, it is for Agamben the bare life, the “life of *homo sacer* ... whose essential function in modern politics we intend to assert” but bare life as such is, importantly, “included in the juridical order ... solely in the form of its exclusion (that is, of its capacity to be killed).”⁴¹ It is important to reemphasize here that bare life for Agamben does not mean strictly biological or animal life but is rather an indistinguishable form of both biological and political life — bare life is the politicized form of animal life. It is “the life that constitutes the first content of sovereign

³⁹ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 8.

⁴⁰ See Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006); and Carl Schmitt, *Constitutional Theory*, trans. Jeffrey Seitzer (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

⁴¹ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 8.

power” where “the production of bare life is the originary activity of sovereignty”⁴² and the form of life that is the “always present and always operative presupposition of sovereignty.”⁴³ A bare life is an indeterminacy, a transitioning, and a transforming, a “threshold of indistinction and of passage between animal and man, *physis* and *nomos*, exclusion and inclusion,”⁴⁴ dwelling in both but belonging to neither — the life of *homo sacer* is “a zone of indistinction and continuous transition between man and beast, nature and culture.”⁴⁵

Bare life is included in the juridical order solely through its exclusion and it is the relationship between bare life as the exception with sovereignty that creates the possibility for politics. Agamben sets up the political in this way: *Homo sacer*, in a similar fashion as the sovereign must exist outside the law in order for it to operate in an extra- or non-legal capacity. This double exclusion for Agamben creates an originary bond between the sovereign and *homo sacer* — the sovereign can act (kill) without legal ramifications and *homo sacer* be killed without legal ramifications. For Agamben, the sovereign and *homo sacer* exists both within and outside of juridical order, where they “present two symmetrical features that have the same structure and are correlative: the sovereign is the one with respect to whom all men are potentially *homines sacri*, and *homo sacer* is the one with respect to whom all men act as sovereigns.”⁴⁶ As two sides of the same coin, bare life and the sovereign form the exceptions that must be excluded for the condition of politics to exist. As Johanna Oksala notes in her essay “Violence and the Biopolitics of Modernity,” “[t]he exclusion of bare life from the realm of politics establishes sovereign power as the power that decides on that exception: bare life is the essential referent of the

⁴² Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 83.

⁴³ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 106.

⁴⁴ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 105.

⁴⁵ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 109.

⁴⁶ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 84.

sovereign decision. In other words, the exclusion of bare life as the exception forms the condition of possibility of politics, and also of sovereignty.”⁴⁷

Agamben’s project in this regard, as I read it, is to demonstrate a lack of clarity and disparateness in the dichotomous relations established by Western political thought. By disrupting such categories he aims at unsettling the demarcated spaces we have set out for ourselves — inside/outside, included/excluded, and the biological and the political. The Modern condition is one where the exception has become the rule, where bare life is no longer excluded from the political but has come to define it. For Agamben, the lines between such categories have never been as clearly defined as others have asserted and now the spheres of *bios* and *zoē* have completely subsumed each other into a “zone of irreducible indistinction,”⁴⁸ engendering a biopolitics. The state of exception, he tells us, has now become the standard operating characteristic of Western politics and a technique of government, so much so that it is no longer recognized or considered as an external and temporary mode and is instead confused with law itself.⁴⁹ In the state of normalized exception, we are all effectively reduced to *homo sacer*. This does not mean that we operate without law or that we are pushed outside the political, but that we are subjected to the unmediated power of the sovereign over those whom have been reduced to bare life. It is the observation that our biological lives and our political lives have become indistinguishable and the subjection of the resulting bare life to sovereign power that Agamben feels Arendt (and others) missed. In a modern politics ‘entirely transformed into biopolitics,’ the limits of Arendt’s studies on totalitarian states, he tells us, are “precisely the absence of any biopolitical perspective” and that what she missed was the that it is “precisely the radical transformation of politics into the realm of bare life (that is, into a camp) legitimated and

⁴⁷ Johanna Oksala, “Violence and the Biopolitics of Modernity,” in *Foucault Studies* No. 10, 2010: 31.

⁴⁸ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 9.

⁴⁹ See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, Part III §7.

necessitated total domination.”⁵⁰ The camps, for Agamben, are not historical anomalies but rather the result of a political space and rationality that we still operate in and if we are to make sense of them we must view them in the light of biopolitics.

Such a thoroughly biopolitical existence places violence at the core of politics stemming from the fundamental relationship between the sovereign and bare life, an originary bond that binds political power to violence and the sovereign’s ability to make exceptional and to kill: Agamben tells us that “sovereign violence is in truth founded not on pact but on the exclusive inclusion of bare life in the state.”⁵¹ The bare life that may be killed is the founding moment of politics⁵² and, rather than being pushed outside the political in its purely biological status, bare life is politicized through and through by its relationship with the sovereign. For Agamben the political, in Western conceptions, is more than a community attempting to pursue the higher ideals of freedom and justice but is, rather, decisively that which we exclude from the realm of politics. Violence is not something ‘social’ or strictly biological but is rather fundamentally and inextricably political.

Foucault, while agreeing with Agamben on the biopolitical nature of modernity, differs fundamentally when it comes to the form and function of sovereignty and biopower, and the relationship between the two. Where Agamben identifies an originary and founding relationship between the sovereign and violence, Foucault sees no such originary violence because sovereign violence must first be viewed in terms of its sociohistorical practices as it relates to certain power formations. Foucault conceives biopower as a modern technique, where Agamben ties violence into the very nature of the way we conceive the political such that violence cannot be separated

⁵⁰ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 120.

⁵¹ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 107.

⁵² On page 83 of *Homo Sacer*, Agamben tells us that “*homo sacer* presents the originary figure of life taken into the sovereign ban and preserves the memory of the originary exclusion through which the political dimension was first constituted.”

from a seemingly ahistorical sovereign.⁵³ In opposition to Agamben's intrinsic and inseparable link between biopower and sovereignty, Foucault's narrow conception of sovereign power, which fails to account for all the extra- or non-legal techniques of power which exist outside of the law, leads him to assert biopower as a supplement to juridical sovereign power. Sovereignty for Agamben, in contrast, is irreducible to the law because it forms the conditions of possibility for the law and so it is precisely the sovereign who must account for the extra- or non-legal techniques of power which exist outside of the law.

Foucault employs the traditional conception of sovereignty as a repressive and deductive power while advancing a different rationality for biopower as a productive power on life meant to optimize it, make it better, and healthier. Sovereign power is, for Foucault, historically founded on the violent right to kill — the right to decide between life and death. By operating under the right to appropriate portions of portions of life — taxes, time, bodies, resources, ultimately the entirety of a life itself — the sovereign exercised the right to take life in order to suppress it. Towards the end of *The History of Sexuality, Vol I*, Foucault asserts that Western political culture had undergone a transformation beginning in the late 1600s, where biopower began to replace in part and supplement traditional sovereign power. Violent sovereignty is no longer the main thrust of political power, but is instead “merely one element among others, working to incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize, and organize.”⁵⁴ Further, the death-right once possessed by the sovereign is now manifested as “simply the reverse of the right of the social body to ensure, maintain, or develop its life”⁵⁵ which “exerts a positive influence on life,

⁵³ See Oksala, “Violence and the Biopolitics of Modernity,” 34; also Peter Fitzpatrick, “Bare Sovereignty: *Homo Sacer* and the Insistence of Law,” in *Theory and Event* Vol. 5 (2), 2001: 50-56.

⁵⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol I*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 136.

⁵⁵ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol I*, 136.

that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it [life], subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations.”⁵⁶

The biopolitical era is marked by a powers directed at the performance of bodies and the processes of life “whose highest function was perhaps no longer to kill, but to invest life through and through.”⁵⁷ The ancient right to take life or let live had given way to the administration of bodies and a calculated management of life set in motion by numerous and diverse techniques of social and economic observation aimed at subjugating bodies and controlling populations. The rationality of biopower is not to destroy but to produce, not violence (necessarily) but positivity and generation. Biopower for Foucault is not unmediated power over bare life — a la Agamben and the sovereign — it is not the threat of death but, rather, the functioning of power and knowledge over the management and organization of life processes. It is a taking charge of life which falls under regimes of truth and regimes of knowledge/power.

The means of biopower are scientific, as are its objectives, utilizing continuous regulations and normalizing, corrective measures based on knowledge provided by experts. The proliferation of this new rationality comes at the expense of the juridical, sovereign legal system where the law “operates more and more as a norm, and that the judicial institution is increasingly incorporated into the continuum of apparatuses (medical and administrative, and so on) whose functions are for the most part regulatory.”⁵⁸ In the era of biopolitics, according to Foucault, laws have become just another method — another instrument — alongside many strategies and regulations used as tactics to administer the life of the population. Importantly, while the sovereign juridical presence recedes for Foucault, so does the overt sovereign claim over life because in the biopolitical era power is not exercised in the traditional manner of the

⁵⁶ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol I*, 137.

⁵⁷ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol I*, 139.

⁵⁸ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol I*, 144.

appointed/elected sovereign, but rather through experts, scientists, and administrators. Political power “is decreasingly the power of the right to take life, and increasingly the right to intervene to make live” inserting itself so as to “improve life by eliminating accidents, the random element, and deficiencies.”⁵⁹ Where previously sovereign power exercised its right over life, killing has become problematic in the biopolitical era in that biopower seeks to hide death and violence rather than celebrate it. It is not the foundational violence of the sovereign that asserts itself as the predominant problematic of violence, but the depoliticized violence of knowledge.

Biopower is obviously capable of unprecedented violence. Foucault’s point, however, is that violence in biopolitical societies must be hidden and is therefore harder to detect. It must be hidden because violence goes against the very rationality of biopower, which serves to enhance life and make it better; violence must then, operate under very strict guidelines, for specifically defined reasons, and under precise administrative control. To accord with the rationality of biopower, violence must first be qualified by scientific/knowledge apparatuses where it can be legitimized by the mediation of experts. But how is violence justified at all? How is it that a power whose main objective is to essentially make live — to proliferate, and make healthier — exercise the power of death? Foucault asks of biopower: “How can power such as this kill, if it is true that its basic function is to improve life, to prolong its duration, to improve its chances, to avoid accidents, and to compensate for failings? How, under these condition, is it possible for a political power to kill, to call for deaths, to demand deaths, to give the order to kill, and to expose not only its enemies but its own citizens to the risk of death?”⁶⁰ The answer, for Foucault, was a racism employed by modern states as the basic mechanism of power, employed primarily as a way of entering into the domain of life under biopolitical control.

⁵⁹ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 248.

⁶⁰ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 254.

The first function of racism, Foucault tells us, is to fragment, to “create caesuras within the biological continuum addressed by biopower”⁶¹ as a way of separating out groups that exist within a population. This racism is advanced, in part, by the “appearance within the biological continuum of the human race of races, the distinction among races, the hierarchy of races, the fact that certain races are described as good and that others, in contrast, are described as inferior.”⁶² A second function of racism is a play on the relationship of war (if you want to live, you must be willing to kill, you must destroy your enemies), but rather than a military-style relationship, it enables a biological relationship between groups — between us and them, between me and you. It establishes a relationship of normalcy and abnormality, where “one had the right to kill those who represented a kind of biological danger to others.”⁶³ The death of the biologically inferior other does more than guarantee my immediate, physical safety, however, “the death of the other, the death of the bad race, of the inferior race ... is something that will make life in general healthier: healthier and purer.”⁶⁴ The rationality of biopower thus legitimizes killing under the stated objectives of improving life, where racism is the precondition that makes killing acceptable: if in biopolitical societies, Foucault tells us, the normalizing powers wish to exercise the sovereign right to kill, it must first become racist. Racism provided the scientific legitimacy and knowledge that allowed — and mandated — the sovereign right over life to operate in modern, biopolitical societies.

The importance of racism in biopolitical states cannot be understated here. The effectiveness of biopower lies in the grounding of its pursuits for the well-being and care of the population in scientific truths and evidence. In that the rationality of violence in biopower is

⁶¹ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 255.

⁶² Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 254-5.

⁶³ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol I*, 138.

⁶⁴ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 255.

seemingly the reverse of the rationality of violence for sovereignty, it is all the more dangerous because it is harder to keep tabs on. While normalizing powers must become racist in order to operate the sovereign right to kill, sovereign power, too, must become racist if it is to work with normalizing technologies and tactics. Understanding the unprecedented ability for violence under biopolitical states, Foucault notes that while discussing the sovereign right to kill he does not mean only the outright act of state sponsored murder, but also “every form of indirect murder: the fact of exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people, or, quite simply, political death, expulsion, rejection, and so on.”⁶⁵

Governmentality and the State: Ubiquitous Politics, Ubiquitous Violence

When Foucault talks about the retreat of the sovereign in the biopolitical era, he is not hinting at a reduction in planning and organizational capacities but rather the displacement of formal ‘state’ powers towards informal technologies of government. In what follows I would like to address this displacement in Foucault’s analyses on state formation and his ‘analytics of government’ as it informs state theory. Looking at the theoretical and methodological positions Foucault asserts in his address of governmentality, I seek to illuminate Foucault’s thinking of the political as an alternative to more traditional critiques of ‘governance’ and its relation to the state. From this analysis we will see the role of violence in its relationship with politics and the implications for state building. Ultimately, a world without violence is not possible for Foucault because of the close relationship between the employment of violence, sovereignty, and biopolitical power. Politics is ubiquitous as is violence, providing the conditions of possibility for political action where situations of governing and of resistance to government are always also to be seen as conditions of violence. Violence here is the embodied experiences inherent in discourses and practices of relations of power and their productive dimensions, and is therefore

⁶⁵ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 256.

historically contingent. To say that violence is ubiquitous, as Foucault does, does not imply a uniform practice or value but it is a denial of transhistorical standards by which to judge violence in its relation to the political and the possibility of a non-violent politics in general.

Foucault introduced the notion of governmentality in his 1978 and 1979 lectures at the Collège de France, later published as *The Birth of Biopolitics* and *Security, Territory, Population*. Foucault utilizes the concept of governmentality in his ‘genealogy of the modern state’ — modern here spanning from Ancient Greece to contemporary conceptions of (neo)liberalism — as a “study of the rationalization of governmental practice in the exercise of political sovereignty.”⁶⁶ It would be misguided, if indeed it is at all possible, to properly address contemporary structures of power without first interrogating the underlying political rationality, which for Foucault is represented by of the relationship between technologies of power and forms of knowledge. By governmentality, Foucault means three things: 1) the entity formed by “institutions, procedures, analysis and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument;” 2) the tendency of Western political thought which leads towards the preeminence “over all other types of power — sovereignty, discipline, and so on — of the type of power that we can call ‘government’ and which has led to the development of a series of specific governmental apparatuses (*appareils*) on the one hand, [and on the other] to the development of a series of knowledges (*saviors*);” 3) the need to understand the “result of the process by which

⁶⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2004), 2.

the state of justice of the Middle Ages became the administrative state in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and was gradually ‘governmentalized’.⁶⁷

Government makes it possible for us to confront political problems and provides certain tactics and techniques for resolving or containing/minimizing such problems. It makes this possible by demarcating concepts, borderlines, types of justifications, and the type of things needing justification — in short, a rationalized discourse surrounding the exercise of political power. Focusing on the ‘arts of government’, Foucault employs a broad conception of government as not only that form of power that acts directly and immediately on others, but rather as a relationship of power that acts upon the actions of others. Beyond purely violence or terms of consent — which are, rather, the instruments or the results of power — the exercise of power “is a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions” and is “always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action.”⁶⁸ Power in the biopolitical era has become a question of government and is to be understood as more than strictly political apparatuses and institutions, but the conduct of individuals and the directing of their souls, the management of households, guidance for children, among others. Governing in this sense is to structure the possible field of actions of others.

In the *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault seeks to address, among other things, the problem of the state on the basis of an analysis of governmentality. He makes clear that his own position regarding a theory of the state can be viewed in multiple lights: on the one hand he can be said to do without a theory of the state, but this does not mean, however, that he nullifies the

⁶⁷ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 108-9.

⁶⁸ Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 220.

effect of state mechanisms. Rather, what he seeks to do is identify the continuous takeover by the state a number of practices or governmentalities — “the problem of bringing under state control, of ‘statification’ ... is at the heart of the questions I have tried to address.”⁶⁹ On the other hand, however, if doing without a theory of the state means departing from the point of view of the state as a universal, as a stand alone structure that functions autonomously, then Foucault is all for it. This is because, he tells us, “the state does not have an essence. The state is not a universal nor in itself an autonomous source of power” but is rather the *effect* of relations of power, strategies, and tactics of control and is, in short, “nothing else but the mobile effect of a regime of multiple governmentalities.”⁷⁰

An analytics of government asserts the conflation and interplay of elements that are compartmentalized and separated under traditional state theory. Foucault’s concern is not with state institutions and the liberation of the individual from state apparatuses but rather with the liberation from the forms of individualization tied to the state, where the stated objective is to “create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects.”⁷¹ Foucault does this by analyzing three modes of objectification that he sees as constitutive of the development of subjects: 1) the sciences (biology, economy, linguistics, etc.); 2) what he calls ‘dividing practices’ where the subject is divided from him or herself and from others (e.g. madness/sanity, sickness/health); and 3) the way a human being turns him or herself into a subject. By addressing the multiple power relations between governmentalities and forms of producing subjects, Foucault attempts to show how the modern state and modern conceptions of the individual co-determine a shared emergence.

⁶⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 77.

⁷⁰ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 77.

⁷¹ Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 208.

The modern state is, for Foucault, not something disparate from the individuals who constituted it, it is not some autonomous thing that exists above the autonomous people who created it but is, on the contrary, co-determined alongside the individual subjectivities under arts of government, technologies and tactics — that is, governmentalities. The state is “a very sophisticated structure, in which individuals can be integrated, under one condition: that this individuality would be shaped in a new form, and submitted to a set of very specific patterns.”⁷² It is these ‘very specific patterns’ that Foucault concerns himself in his attempts to provide a history of the relationships between rationalities and forms of knowledge. The task at hand is to demonstrate how a set of practices and their coordination with regimes of truth were able to produce; that is, how the relationship between knowledge and practice can create what had prior to not existed — things like madness, abnormality, delinquency, and so on. — and make them into things. These things, however, continue not to exist for Foucault: by demonstrating how something can come from nothing, his aim is not to demonstrate how an illusion or an error could be born but rather “how a particular regime of truth, and therefore not an error, makes something that does not exist able to become something. It is not an illusion since it is precisely a set of practices, real practices, which established it and thus imperiously marks it out in reality.”⁷³ The purpose of such analyses is to understand the different rationalities and governmentalities that link us to the state and to modes of subjectification tied to the state with the ultimate goal of promoting new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of traditional conceptions of individuality.

Thomas Lemke’s evaluation of the methodological approach of Foucault’s analytics of government characterizes his approach into a theoretical perspective consisting of three

⁷² Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 214.

⁷³ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 19.

dimensions: 1) a historical nominalism that emphasizes the role of knowledge and discourse in the formation of the state; 2) accounting for state transformations by examining governmental technologies (political technologies and technologies of the self) that consist of material and symbolic devices; and 3) a strategic account that conceives the state as both an instrument and an effect of political strategies.⁷⁴ It would be useful here to briefly elaborate on this characterization so as to highlight the methodological structure of Foucault's conceptions of governmentality and to strengthen our understanding of the co-determination of the state and the subject.

Lemke's first dimension is that of Foucault's historical nominalism and Foucault's assertion that "government by state agencies must be conceived of as a contingent political process and a singular event in need of explanation rather than a given fact."⁷⁵ This nominalism is aimed at subverting essentialist claims and claims to universal truths by exposing the singularity of historical events and refuting deduction from any historical constant or perceived anthropological trait. It accomplishes this task by examining the relations, connections, and strategies that constitute those things being counted as necessary and universal. The purpose is not to refute the existence of an entity called 'the state' but rather to call into question what exactly 'the state' refers to. By historically situating the conditions under which states emerge and transform, we can study the conditions that allowed for an object called the state to appear that seems to have predated the political processes themselves, giving the impression that it was directing these processes.

The state for Foucault is constituted by an epistemological composition similar to that of madness and delinquency where it is neither a real thing nor an error but is something "that [does] not exist and yet which [is] inscribed in reality and fall under a regime of truth dividing

⁷⁴ Thomas Lemke, "An Indigestible Meal? Foucault, governmentality and state theory," in *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory* 2 (2007).

⁷⁵ Lemke, "An Indigestible Meal?" 46.

the true and the false.”⁷⁶ Expectedly, political knowledge plays an important role in an analysis of the state where modern states are formed around the actions based on the development of sciences concerning themselves with human populations and human behaviors. Such rationalities link the techniques of government to truth where “state agencies produce and proliferate forms of knowledge that enable them to act upon the governed reality” and where the state is constituted by discourses, narratives, and world views “that allow political actors to develop strategies and realize goals” such that the state is “not only a material structure and a mode of thinking, but also a lived and embodied experience, a mode of existence.”⁷⁷ Forms of knowledge — regimes of truth — form a defining role in the material formation of the state, which itself is not a single, constitutive event but the terms of which transform and evolve over time.

Lemke’s second characterization concerns the broad conceptions of technology employed by studies of governmentality that include both material and symbolic devices, as well as political technologies and technologies of the self as a way of accounting for state transformation and positioning. Conceptions of technology in an analytics of government is broad in that it goes beyond the traditional understanding and simplification of technologies as an expression of social relations or, the reverse, that social relations are the product of technological determination. Through the analysis of broad and varied technologies, Foucault avoids the traditional distinctions made between powers at different levels and, importantly, he avoids the separation of the individual from the state by conceiving of the processes of individualization and institutionalization as technologies of government. This approach opens up an interrogation of the relationships between different technologies and the ways in which technologies of the self and institutional technologies are articulated with and through each other. It attempts to

⁷⁶ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 22.

⁷⁷ Lemke, “An Indigestible Meal?” 48.

understand the materiality of regimes of truth and life styles by examining the ways in which they are produced by different technologies — by different practices of disciplining the body, the processes of self-guidance, and the ways we relate to ourselves and to others. An analytics of government then allows us to open “empirical investigations of historical forms of articulation between physical being and moral-political existence: how and when do certain bodily experiences become a moral, political or legal problem?”⁷⁸

In addition to material devices, Foucault considers the symbolic devices of discourse and narrative as technologies but with the understanding that they are performative, embodied practices. Here technologies represent the mechanisms, tactics, and procedures (i.e. methods of evaluation and processes of examination, methods of ordering and annotation through graphs, charts, and the organization of time and space, etc.) through which political powers seek to shape the conduct of others in pursuit of specific objectives. The implication here is that Foucault conflates elements typically separated into definite realms in theories of the state: an autonomous individual and an autonomous state. As opposed to the idea of the state originating in an institutional apparatus, Foucault asserts an account of these institutions as technologies where “instead of taking institutions as the point of departure, [an analytics of government] focuses on technologies that are materialized and stabilized in institutional settings” and rather than attributing political transformations to an autonomous state, “an analytics of government traces them in new technologies and forms of knowledge” that provide the condition of possibility for the appearance of the autonomous state and the autonomous individual.⁷⁹

The final characterization of Foucault’s analytics of government is the assertion of the state as an effect and instrument of relations of power and technologies where the state is an

⁷⁸ Lemke, “An Indigestible Meal?” 49.

⁷⁹ Lemke, “An Indigestible Meal?” 50.

“*effect* of strategies since it cannot be reduced to a homogeneous, stable actor that exists prior to political action” and is to be understood as “an emergent and complex resultant of conflicting and contradictory governmental policies.”⁸⁰ The state is not an entity of any definite form that results from consensus and social contract because consent, compromise, and social contract are the product of political strategy and not its point of origin. Further, the state is never a defined entity in that it consists of a set of practices — of governmentalities — that are continually shifting and adjusting to the objectives of governmental action. Foucault’s objective was to locate specific types of rationalities that enable a way of governing to be modeled on the state that is considered a given in relation to governmental practice (since we can only govern what is already there) but is also and at the same time an objective to be constructed: “The state is at once that which exists, but which does not exist yet exist enough”⁸¹ In this way, the state is an instrument to be employed by the various government practices at work in the pursuit of their objectives — the state itself is a tactic of government, an instrument and effect of governmentalities, and not their point of origin.

The state has a unique positioning in an analysis of power relations in that it, amidst the many forms and specific situations that power relations and government take, the contemporary state is not simply one among the multitude. It is, rather, unique in that “in a certain way all other forms of power relation must refer to it. But this is not because they are derived from it; it is rather because power relations have come more and more under state control ... [and] one could say that power relations have been progressively governmentalized, that is to say, elaborated, rationalized, and centralized in the form of, or under the auspices of, state institutions.”⁸² Rather than thinking the primacy of the state as an actor in the traditional conceptions of the public and

⁸⁰ Lemke, “An Indigestible Meal?” 50, emphasis original.

⁸¹ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 4.

⁸² Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 224.

private spheres with their respective lines of demarcation, an analytics of government takes us beyond the theoretical separation of the state and society (or state and the market) and explicates the state/society dichotomy as the result of specific practices and governmentalities.

Governmentalities which are at once internal and external to the state because it “is the tactics of government which make possible the continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence of the state and what is not, the public versus the private...” such that the state “can only be understood in its survival and its limits on the basis of the general tactics of governmentality.”⁸³

An analytics of government allows us to view the ways that different rationalities produce different discursive fields that establish ‘rational’ exercises of power. By interrogating the many forms, tactics, and strategies of modern conceptions of violence we can better understand how it functions as a politics of truth and the ways in which it produces new knowledge and forms of governmentalizing new areas of intervention. In suggesting that a state is the effect and instrument of governmentalities, an analytics of government asserts essentialized violence a political endeavor that seeks to reinforce a social reality that it suggests already exists. By focusing on the contemporary strategies and tactics of government, we are able to better understand the co-determination of the state and the subject, the effects of which go beyond the reproduction of existing social cleavages but are the product of new inventions of techniques of domination and power relations that reflect new government objectives and adaptations to social topography. An important — crucial — contribution of governmentality is that it facilitates an understanding of the materiality of theoretical or ‘ideological’ production of practices and concepts in terms of an historical space. It calls for reflection on the conditions that made a rationality or a knowledge *real* and problematizes their truth-effects.

⁸³ Foucault, “Governmentality,” 103.

Foucault's body of work has served to politicize domains that had either become depoliticized or were traditionally considered non- or apolitical; his mantra 'power is everywhere' extends the political beyond any sort of limits or demarcated spaces. Foucault asserts the world and the ways we view it as the sedimentation of power relations and not a given, objective space; he views ontology as political ontology, as the result of struggle and contestation. He broadens the definition of politics, expanding past the traditional concerns for the allocation of resources and towards the conditions of possibility for truth, where truth and objectivity (ontology) are the temporary victors in the ongoing struggle to define reality. We cannot, then, demarcate areas considered as 'the political' and study certain sets of institutions apart from others but must instead analyze the politics of truth with the rationalities and governmentalities that constitute it.

Governmentality as Critique of Neoliberalism

Many considerations of the relationship between neoliberalism and violence circle primarily around concerns for two broadly conceived positions: on the one hand, you have the fear of coercion and central planning, F.A. Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*⁸⁴ being the ready example. For Hayek, centralized planning of the economy on any large scale required the use of coercion, where the forcefully applied disciplining of planning ultimately resulted in the dependency of economic actors on the centralized economy. Neoliberalism was for Hayek the way around the violence of state economic planning of WWII Europe. On the other hand, you have the critics of neoliberalism and the violence that come with the proliferation of neoliberalism around the globe. Naomi Klein's *Shock Doctrine*⁸⁵ is a good example of this, where she argues that a consistent use of terror and violence has accompanied the coercion of new populations into accepting the economic mode. Both of these views, however, account for

⁸⁴ F.A. Hayek, *The Collected Works of F.A. Hayek, Vol. II: The Road to Serfdom*, ed. Bruce Caldwell (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007).

⁸⁵ Naomi Klein, *Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Picador, 2008).

political violence as external to governing rationalities — that is, they view it as instrumental. Klein, for example, discusses the democratic unpopularity of neoliberal practices and the necessity for such practices to be *imposed* on populations through forceful measures, leaving various portions of the population economically worse off through economic moves that lowered wages and increased prices. Hayek, in his take on instrumental violence as tool for centralized planning, sees the relationship between violence and neoliberalism as antithetical. The problem for both these ways of thinking is that there is nothing specific about neoliberal rationality as such that ties it to political violence. For such thinkers, the violence that accompanies neoliberalism is contingent and purely instrumental, understood as a means to distribute power in ways beneficial for certain segments of the population. The strength of Foucault’s analysis of neoliberalism as governmentality is that it allows us to understand more fully the relationship between violence and government rationalities in a manner than moves beyond an understanding of violence as purely instrumental.

Many contemporary critiques of neoliberalism and of the state employ this insufficient understanding of an instrumental violence, stemming from the state-phobia following WWII. As with many of Foucault’s other projects, his presentation of governmentality was to demonstrate that our efforts at liberation and social critique were aimed at the wrong targets. What we need to fear he tells us, what is presently at issue, is not the growth of the state but rather its reduction and that those “who share in the great state phobia should know they are following the direction of the wind...”⁸⁶ Foucault criticized not only the tendency to place the state at the center of political problems but also, as we saw above, the attempts to situate the state essentially in political thought. Foucault’s unique contribution is that he allows us to think neoliberalism as a set of practices and techniques of governing and a rationality that combines the state and such

⁸⁶ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 191.

practices in a coextensive, codetermining manner. Neoliberalism is not a lack of government but rather consists of new points of governmental interventions in new modes and practices.

It is in the *Birth of Biopolitics* that we see Foucault's attempts at describing the historical transition from liberalism to neoliberalism, emphasizing what he viewed as a fundamental shift in the mechanisms of liberalism itself. This shift, from a naturalism to an anti-naturalism or anti-humanism, followed the neoliberal transformation of the role of the economy and politics and the relations between the two. For Foucault classical liberalism, while advocating for ideals of individual liberty, also posited society and the economy as governed by self-regulating processes and principles where individual liberty was meant to allow these processes to function uninhibited. The natural, spontaneous self-interest of individuals attempting to maximize their wealth would drive the economy while the mechanisms of the market itself would harmonize the interest of individuals by determining resource allocation through the process of supply and demand. Foucault marks the point of departure for neoliberalism in 1930s Germany with the Freiburg School of economists (the "Ordoliberals") and, later, with the derived American bent of the Chicago School.

Foucault, in asserting that the market economy can inform the state and reform society (or vice versa), elaborates on certain transformations and shifts in classical liberal doctrine conducted by the ordoliberals — most notably the shift from exchange to competition in the principle of the market. The market in classical liberalism was defined by free exchange between individuals where the exchange established the equivalence of values and where the role of the state was not to intervene, but to supervise and to ensure the freedoms of those involved in market exchanges. For the neoliberals, however, the essential principle of the market is competition and practically speaking, Foucault asserts, more or less all liberal theory has

accepted the primacy of competition over equivalence of value. Building on traditional liberal thought, economic rationality was maintained through complete competition and the formation of prices which could measure economic magnitudes and therefore regulate choices. The ordoliberals broke with tradition, however, by countering the grip of a 'naïve naturalism' — that is, of a *laissez-faire* market as the result of a natural and spontaneous process. Competition they say "is absolutely not a given of nature" and not the "result of a natural interplay of appetites, instincts, behavior, and so on" but is instead "only due to the essence that characterizes and constitutes it;" competition has its own logic and "its effects are only produced if this logic is respected."⁸⁷ The logic and effects of competition only exists under certain conditions and it is these condition which must be constructed through the *historical* objective of governmentalities. There is not the classical delineation between the realm of the free market and the realm of state intervention since "the market, or rather pure competition, which is the essence of the market, can only appear if it is produced, and if it produced by an active governmentality."⁸⁸ Government must accompany the market from start to finish.

The task then of the intervening neoliberal policy was to construct and maintain the material infrastructure in which the mechanisms of competition could function. This was not the carving of space associated with classical liberalism where the two disparate realms of politics and the economy battled each other for territory but rather articulating the formal principles of an economy onto techniques of government. It was the not the protection of a *laissez-faire* free space but the constant oversight and intervention in order to create — to plan — for competition. Political intervention was required into the mechanism of society itself if competition was to become the guiding principle of not only the economy, but of human behavior. The vigilant

⁸⁷ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 120.

⁸⁸ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 121. For Foucault's discussion of the shifts made by neoliberalism in this regard see pages 117-121.

policing required for obtaining and maintaining the institutions of competition placed state violence at the center of neoliberal governmentality where “state violence cannot be understood as contingent and external when the free market has to be artificially produced by the means of effective government.”⁸⁹ In this way, state violence acts as a means of ensuring the spontaneous logic of the market and the competition required for a culture of entrepreneurialism and while coercion is used, it is at the levels of market mechanisms and thus avoids the fears of totalitarian-style planned economies of limited competition and limited market choice: “State violence is eliminated from the level of that dictates people’s consumer choices and preferences only to appear on the level that precludes them from interfering with or opting out of the economic game.”⁹⁰

Neoliberal intervention goes beyond creating the conditions of possibility for a competitive free market economy and acts as a comprehensive sociopolitical project that centers the market as the organizing principle for the state and for society. It functioned as a political rationality that brought the political and the social under an economic calculus where, in the case of the Chicago School, neoliberalism was characterized by its employment of an economic rationale and mode of analysis to political and social phenomena — that is, to realms previously though disparate from the economic. Economic rationale no longer applied strictly to the economy or to ‘economic mechanisms’ but to things marriage, the education of children, and criminality — to human action in its entirety. Applying an economic calculus means a more generalized conception of the traditional sense of the term involving the identification of the object of economic analysis with conducts involving the optimal allocation of scarce resources to alternative ends. Here, instead, we find the possibility of a generalization of the economic object

⁸⁹ Johanna Oksala, “Violence and Neoliberal Governmentality,” in *Constellations* vol. 18 (2011): 479.

⁹⁰ Johanna Oksala, “Violence and Neoliberal Governmentality,” in *Constellations* vol. 18 (2011): 479.

to any conduct which employs limited means to one end among others so that the object of economic analysis can be “identified with any purposeful conduct which involves, broadly speaking, a strategic choice of means, ways, and instruments: in short, the identification of the object of economic analysis with any rational conduct.”⁹¹ Going further, Foucault explains, we can make sense not only of rational behavior in terms of an economic calculus, but all (i.e. including non-rational) behavior: Foucault references the American neoliberal economist Gary Becker in situating *homo economicus* as someone who “accepts reality.” That is, Foucault paraphrases Becker, any individual conduct that responds systematically to modifications in the environment — any conduct that “accepts reality” — is subject to economic analysis.⁹² This is what allows for a definition of the economic, and the application of an economic analysis, to as the science of the systematic, non-random responses to environmental variables.

Becker, (in)famous for his analyses on family economics and human capital, and his definition of *homo economicus* is not the standard definition for economists but it highlights the nature of neoliberal governmentality. In classical liberal economics *homo economicus* acts in a self-interested manner that happens to converge spontaneously with the self-interest of other economic actors. It is such actors that are outside the realm of the exercise of political power and are governed instead by an ‘invisible hand’ and they are to be left alone: *laissez-faire*. Becker’s definition, on the other hand, of *homo economicus* as the person who responds systematically to changes in the environment is someone who is eminently governable. This allows American neoliberalism the ability to generalize the economic form of the market throughout the social body and social phenomena not usually conducted through monetary exchanges. In other words, it applies an economic grid to realms previously defined as not economic but social and political

⁹¹ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 268-9.

⁹² Gary Becker, “Irrational action and economic theory,” in *Journal of Political Economy*, vol. 70 (1962): 153-168 referenced in Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 269.

— an economic analysis of the non-economic. An analysis made in terms of supply and demand is applied to mother-child relationships, marriage, families and households, and a number of other domains where the outcome is measured in terms of cost and benefit as an investment in human capital. Criminality, for example, became a matter of economic calculation: what is the cost of policing and building prisons to house certain types of criminals versus the cost of having them run free? What is the effectiveness of certain types of punishments on dissuading certain crimes? The goal here being to find the least costly and most effective way of obtaining punishment towards the elimination of undesirable conduct from society. The law, Foucault tells us, is what ties penal practices to the economy, where “*homo penalis*, the man who can legally be punished, the man exposed to the law and who can be punished by the law is strictly speaking *homo economicus*.”⁹³

Neoliberalism assumes metaphysical universals about the rational nature of self-interested actors that allow it to assert a conception of the human condition not only as a means of economic growth, but for defining the limits and boundaries of sociopolitical values as well. The organization of society must be structured for economic growth that provides not only for its material wellbeing but for the attainment of individual freedoms and a direct path for the good life. Free markets and enforced competition structure not only the most desired economic organization, but a moral and political directive conditioning notions of political freedom based on individual responsibility.

Governing Rationalities, Truth Effects, and a Concern for Existence

Ours is a world saturated with violence. Violence exists at every level and in every space, taking many forms, employed in various modes, and producing diverse effects. The legacy of the

⁹³ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 249. See also 239-260 for Foucault’s discussion of the application of an economic analysis to previously non-economic domains, the domain of criminality in particular.

twentieth century includes by most estimates over a hundred million who died in wars and conflicts, genocides, the Holocaust, and gulags. The twenty-first century already presents itself with wars on terror politely euphemized to “Overseas Contingency Operations” and the violence of revolutions and ethnic conflicts. The frequency and magnitude of violent occurrences demands us to consider and reconsider the position and role of violence in our thinking of the political and our assessment and understanding of the present. This is not to accept violence as inherent in human social projects nor as a naïve political realism, but rather a call for radical attempts at addressing violence in our daily lives in the myriad forms it takes. Even if violence is something that is unavoidable in terms of the vulnerability of human flesh, we are still left with the ability to work against its actualization. Such vulnerability commits us to a relentless interrogation of violence and of the political imaginary in response to the imperative for political action.

By opening up what qualifies as the political, Foucault has expanded criticism to new domains and in new ways. In examining the experiences of sexuality, madness, and delinquency and their respective mechanisms of power he brought them under new forms of interrogation by politicizing them and showing how varied practices as relations of power were modes of domination and exclusion. Important in these practices of marginalization and domination is the scientific and, more recently in new ways, economic search for objectivity and truth that has allowed for distinctions between true and false, healthy and abnormal. The task then is to thoroughly politicize truth and pursue interrogations and analyses that consist of the ways in which contemporary societies are governed and the forms of political violence that are compatible with modern governmental rationalities. This means going beyond the individuals and the institutions themselves and beyond villainizing the state alone — we must take our

critique beyond the sovereign/judicial conception of power and to the forms of rationality themselves. “The criticism of power wielded over the mentally sick or mad cannot be restricted to psychiatric institutions; nor can those questioning the power to punish be content with denouncing prisons as total institutions. The question is: how are such relations of power rationalized? Asking it is the only way to avoid other institutions, with the same objectives and the same effects, from taking their stead.”⁹⁴

We must look at governmentalities as extensions of sovereign and disciplinary power and as a mode of state violence that allows us to question its tactics and strategies of employment. Following Foucault’s analysis of the state as governmentality, we see a set of practices and strategies of governing that are aimed at something other than the strict enforcement of laws alone. The practices and strategies of government — the instruments of government — become diverse tactics rather than laws that seek to arrange things towards the management of certain ends. The practices seeking to ensure order, control, and government functionality — the management of things — are importantly irreducible to the rule of law and a juridical order. In this way they rely heavily on extra legal practices and also on forms of knowledge that help to create discursive fields in which the exercise of such tactics are presented and understood as rational. Governmentality is the emergence of a particular and internal relationship between power and knowledge, tactics and rationalities, where forms of knowledge and truths fundamentally guides and sets the conditions for political power. The goal then is to expose such practices as power relations and the role they play in our conceptions of political reality — of knowledge and truth.

⁹⁴ Michel Foucault, “‘Omnes et Singulatim’: Toward a Critique of Political Reason,” in *Essential Works of Foucault Vol. 3: Power*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2001), 324-5.

Such a view of political reality, such a calling out of political reality, calls attention to the inventedness of our world. It brings to the forefront what Foucault calls the ‘history of the present’, a criticism that makes our reality appear as the effect of historically contingent practices, and an experience motivated by, it seems to me, a discomfort: the discomfort of existing in a space one is obliged to live in, always already implicated in communities of thought and action, yet where one finds it impossible to live. That is, finds it impossible in terms of thought and action with regards to possible relations with the self and to others. Such an experience involves the relations of the self and others such that the self is put rather squarely in doubt. Problematization helps us in understanding this experience by examining new forms of historically conditioned fields of experience — new forms and objects of truth, new ways of speaking the truth about ourselves and about others, new forms of subjectivities in relation to new modes of governance. The role of the historian of the present is then to dismantle reality as a starting point, to assert a non-identity that distances oneself from the framework of the present in terms of identities and institutions, but also in terms of relations to the self and to others, that opens the possibility for a different experience of how one thinks and acts. To begin such an interrogation requires the address of two essential concerns: our relationship to truth and our relationship to existence as experiences of truth. These two topics will be the focus of Chapter Four.

Foucault’s assertion of *power/knowledge* tells us that subjects and objects don’t exist in the world as preexisting constants to be discovered, but are instead determined through practices of power; our social practices as relations of power determine subjectivities and domains of knowledge. “Power produces; it produces reality, it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production,”

Foucault tells us.⁹⁵ Foucault references Nietzsche when discussing the break with the Western tradition of uniting knowledge and things and instead asserting that reality is the direct result of social practices as power relations and struggles over truth and objectivity. It is the role and formation of truth as the dominant interpretation and the implications for a politics of truth — the formations of new subjects and objects of truth and knowledge — that I turn to in the following chapter.

⁹⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 194.

CHAPTER FOUR: Truth, Violence, and Something Altogether Different

What is the meaning of the ever new appearances of these founders of moralities and religions, these instigators of fights over moral valuations, these teachers of remorse and religious wars?

What is the meaning of these heroes on this stage? Thus far these have been the heroes, and everything else, even if at times it was all that could be seen and was much too near to us, has always merely served to set the stage for these heroes, whether it was machinery or coulisse or took the form of confidants and valets — Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* §74

When individuals kill in the name of democracy and freedom, they maim or injure others in war on the presumption that their particular violence is supported — justified — by essential truths about the human condition and their particular role in social organization. A critique of dominant conceptions of redemptive violence requires the exposure of power relations and their constitutive role in violent practices by which individuals constitute themselves as subjects of identities bound to these truths. To set an interrogation of these truths against the productive power of truth is, in one way, to set subjects against subjectivities in ways that allow subjects to loosen the grip of the identities that govern them. In seeking practices that break the hold of those identifications by which individuals become the violent subject presupposed by discourses of course, we can ask: What are the games of truth by which individuals propose to think their own nature when they perceive themselves to be heroic and not barbaric; when they consider themselves justified in the use of force and not terrorists; when individuals judge their actions according to the truth of redemptive violence.

In this chapter, I set truth of violent subjects against subjectivities of violence in attempts at politicizing those truths and problematizing the downstream practices of violence and marginalization. My focus here is not to engage specific truths regarding violence, but to prepare

the groundwork for such analyses that will come in the following chapters by outlaying a critique of violent rationalities and the truths that produce them. Ultimately, I seek to create space that will allow us to loosen ourselves from the interests that attach us to these identities and from the fear of undoing these identities. The creation of a space that allows to engage the possibility of what Foucault describes as ‘straying afield from oneself.’ A space to guide ourselves by a curiosity, the “only kind of curiosity ... that is worth acting upon with a degree of obstinacy: not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what it is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself.”¹

The Question of Truth

The question of truth or of truthfulness appears as a founding condition for our inquiries into the past and into the validity of claims made against the present. Claims made against a present that is being analyzed and studied, poked and prodded like so much matter to be sifted through and to be decided upon. There is a demand for truthfulness, for the presence of the True as a protection from deception — from that which misleads or corrupts. There is suspicion about the truth with its form and function such that we can question the very existence of truth itself: respondent to varying degrees of subjectivism and whether or not it has a place in our historical activities and our accounts of them. We now offer critiques of history and criticisms of anything resembling a storable truth with accusations of scientific or ideological bias or as merely the product of simple self-serving power moves. What role, then does truth have at all in our inquiries into the past and into the present? What is the role of truth, now, in our histories and counter-histories? What are we to make of competing claims of *the* truth; or, if there is no Truth,

¹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 8.

what do we seek and what do we produce with the demand for truthfulness? Do we need something like Truth to account for the history of truth?

When Bernard Williams claims that we “need to take seriously the idea that to the extent that we lose a sense of the value of truth, we shall certainly lose something and may well lose everything,”² we can say: of course. The very function of truth is to be meaningful and to function in society. In his discussion about truth and truthfulness, however, Williams misses the mark as Nietzsche would have us understand it. Williams employs Nietzsche to assert an epistemological position by arguing that truth is a universal while truthfulness is to be measured culturally. In doing so, he remains squarely within the philosophical boundaries of a discourse Nietzsche disposes of — that of epistemology. “If you do not really believe in the existence of truth,” Williams asks us in *Truth and Truthfulness*, “what is the passion for truthfulness a passion for?”³ If we can demonstrate, then, the importance of the virtues of truth — accuracy and sincerity, for Williams — then we can demonstrate the downstream necessity for truth as a concept. Contrasting two types of thinkers – the *deniers* and those of *common sense* — Williams identifies the *deniers* as those who deny truth as a politically defensible project and warns it is this group that is in danger of losing the virtues of truth and may, in fact, “lose everything.” The *deniers*, constituted by the likes of Rorty, deconstructionists, social constructionist, and ‘post-ies’ generally, claim that in a deeper sense, “there is no value of truth: they think that the values of these states or activities [the various states and activities associated with the truth], if they have any, are not to be explained in terms of the truth.”⁴

It is this position that Williams rejects and insists, among other things, that *deniers* accept at a minimum the existence of plain, everyday truths, such as the fact that it is Tuesday or that

² Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 7.

³ Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, 2.

⁴ Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, 7.

Paris is located in France. There is no alternative to the concept of belief as a mental attitude aimed at the truth and that something would be wrong if I believe in something that is false: one cannot form beliefs at all purely as a matter of individual will. By their nature, Williams asserts, beliefs are dedicated to reality and one cannot merely choose to believe what they know to be false (there is, of course, the possibility of lying and of simply asserting a falsity). Referencing *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*, Williams argues against a reading of Nietzsche that posits reality as fiction — where Nietzsche asserts that nothing can really be said to be identical or the same and that all identity is a fiction — this is simply a “confused formula” which he later overcame. Williams uses an example of a snake: “the concept ‘snake’ allows us to classify various individual things as ‘the same animal,’ and to recognize one individual thing as ‘the same snake.’ It is trivially true that ‘snake’ is a human concept, a cultural product. But it is a much murkier proposition that its use somehow *falsifies* reality — that ‘in itself’ the world does not contain snakes, or indeed anything else you might mention.”⁵

For Williams, beliefs are dedicated to respecting reality and that such plain, everyday truths are not the exercise of someone’s more or less arbitrary exercise of power, an understanding he reaches from Nietzsche’s insistence that truth is independent of the will to power. This understanding, I will argue in the sections that follow, misses the point of Nietzsche’s critique of truth, knowledge, and the epistemological subject. In separating the will to truth from a will to power, Nietzsche is not implying a transcendentalism or universal truth unaffected by individual will. The fact that it is Tuesday was not the object of Nietzsche’s negation of Western epistemology and metaphysics, but rather the historically contingent condition of “Tuesday” or of “snake” — that is, of time and of space, the ordering of our world, etc. We can take Williams’ discussion as an attempt at recuperating the virtues of truth by

⁵ Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, 17, emphasis original.

demonstrating their utility for a society in the state of nature. This is demonstrated by his genealogical and fictitious state of nature, where the pooling of information is advantageous for a group in conquering their environment and where shared information benefits all. Williams' genealogy is a demonstration of the virtues of truth (again, accuracy and sincerity) grounding them in basic human survival and notions of cooperation. In this way, we can see the genealogical roots of truthfulness as valuable to society while avoiding Platonism and/or transcendental understandings.

While such a hypothetical can prove useful in exposing the historical roots of truthfulness, it does little to justify it or to demonstrate its value, which is Williams' aim. What truthfulness engenders for Williams is mutual cooperation, which betters life for all. But in learning that truthfulness is beneficial in this utilitarian sense, we are left wondering why truthfulness is valuable for itself and not merely for the goods it produces. Williams fails to demonstrate why the virtues of truthfulness has any intrinsic value in his functional story of the fictional state of nature and instead leaves us only with their instrumental value, which could easily be comparable to a number of other virtues. Williams' genealogy, then, looks much like utilitarianism in that he argues that the virtue of truthfulness rests on its ability to raise human happiness or well being. It is not the specific virtues of truth and truthfulness, per se, that Nietzsche is combating but rather the underlying roots of the belief that such virtues are valuable based on justifications pulled from the apparent world.

Perspectivism for Nietzsche isn't a justification of any point of view taken from the evidence of reality as appearance, but rather the understanding that what qualifies as evidence for justification itself — along with what we take as evidentiary in the apparent world — is wrapped within an epistemological endeavor produced by a will to power. By trying to vindicate the

virtues of truth with talk of utilitarian justifications for beliefs and assertions of truthfulness, by maintaining the connection between truth and happiness, Williams stays firmly within the Aristotelian tradition that Nietzsche sought to unravel. Williams is representative of the traditional Western philosophical approach to, and understanding of, truth that I intend to critique here. I will do this through the juxtaposition of subjectivities founded on external conceptions of truth with subjectivities as the production of process intrinsic to relations governing truth itself. The effort being to show how certain power relations become socially and politically useful when they grant certain social purchase to those individuals employing them.

The Production of Truth and a Critique of Violence

A more pressing investigation into the role of truth requires an interrogation of the operations instilling truth-values and the mechanisms by which such truth-values operate. The mechanisms of truth-values cannot be performed — exercised — unless an economy of truth functions in and through those mechanisms. Such mechanisms generate certain political and economic utility and do not function unless they are formed and organized as knowledge and put into circulation. What is required, then, is a look at the ways in which these techniques of truth adapt and transform, or remain stable, in order to maintain a status as politically and economically useful and to demonstrate the profit and utility that is derived from them.

My aim here is not to address the problems of truth as determined by theories of correspondence or theories of coherence, about ‘every day truths’ and/or ontological truths, but rather to analyze the problems of truth-telling and its functions as discursive institutions. More specifically, I am interested in the speaking subject within such institutions — the epistemological subject that functions as both truth-knower and truth-teller and the implications for both herself and for society. It is not a matter, in this way, of determining whether what we

consider true to be ‘in fact’ true. Whatever a particular theory of truth has to offer in terms of epistemological certainty, truth as a type of game is a very real thing with very real social/political/historical implications. My interest here is not to discern the true from the false, the good from the bad, or the correct from the erroneous; rather, I seek to explicate the function of truth as it produces and the specific modes and institutions that it produces.

I do this through analyses of the institutions, practices, habits, and modes and the ways in which they inform specific types of behavior, create individuals and groups alike with certain habits that engage truth and violence in a specific way. In another way, we can look at what arises as outliers to conceptions of truth, to those ‘false’ or ‘wrong’ ideas and practices, and the ways in which it informs the familiar, the unquestioned and undiscussed — what is considered the largely unproblematic fields of experience.

I will address the problem of truth as it relates to the production of violence by first looking at truth from two broad perspectives: 1) the ways in which we determine the validity of our truth statements and our ability to gain access to the truth; and 2) the importance of truth for the individual and for society — the knowing and telling the truth — and the importance of having truth tellers in society and being able to identify them. Generally speaking, the aim of this chapter will be to identify and problematize the production of a discourse of violence as it relates to the function of a discourse of truth. More specifically, the relationship between discourses of violence and practices of truth as it concerns modes of living and the processes of subjugating the self and others. I will build on the critique established here in the next chapter when I look at the embodied practices that result from understandings of truths pertaining to the war dead. For example, the ways in which we comport ourselves physically around different memorial settings like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall or the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

My approach will begin with an inquiry into the ways in which domains of knowledge have been formed on the basis of social practices and how they, in turn, form social practices of their own. The issue with many such domains of knowledge and analyses concerning social practices is the severely defective assumption that the subject of knowledge and forms of knowledge themselves exist prior to and outside any interaction with the knowing subject. I will address this concern by showing how social practices both engender new discourses of knowledge and new objects of knowledge therein, but also the ways in which social practices and discourses surrounding truth and knowledge produce new subjects of knowledge and new forms of subjugated relationships with ourselves and with others.

Western philosophy and political thought has long relied on the primacy of the subject as the foundational element for all thought and conceptions of agency. The concrete subject has been the foundation that makes knowledge possible and sets the conditions of possibility of things like freedom, knowledge, and truth. Here, instead, I follow an account of truth where truth doesn't happen to the human subject, rather, the human subject happens to truth and where subjectivity happens within history and is constantly transformed by history. An analyses of discourses of truth and knowledge as related to social practices and set against the primacy of a stable and given subject of knowledge is my first hurdle.

From the outset, my trajectory is directly linked to Nietzsche's work on the history of truth and his historical analyses on the formation of the subject. In the same vein, I am utilizing what Foucault in "Truth and Juridical Forms" called an 'external history of truth', a methodological approach which demonstrates truth as formed through the formation of certain games, through which "one sees certain forms of subjectivity, certain object domains, [and]

certain types of knowledge come into being.”⁶ Within Nietzsche’s complex and diverse work we find an analysis of different types of knowledge and their formation, none of which required or in fact originated with a given, presupposed subject of knowledge. It will be beneficial here to open a discussion of Nietzsche’s take on the epistemological subject and the function of truth for my analyses of the way individuals conduct themselves in matters pertaining to violence — the rules people follow when examining, ordering, classifying, and acting when responding to or perpetrating violence. Practices don’t exist without underlying rationalities and it is my goal to interrogate production of true discourses as they justify and provide reasons for acting in certain ways and for specific purposes. I am interested in the ways in which we govern ourselves and others by the production of truth and I seek to resituate the production of the true and the role of the false in the center of a critique of violence.

Nietzsche and the Metaphor of truth

There are many ways to read and to respond to what Nietzsche has offered up regarding truth and there is no lack of work concerning this topic. When addressing the question “is it true that there is no truth?” we are faced with a well-tread paradox: an affirmation results in the claim of at least one truth (that there is no truth) while responding ‘no’ is the denial that there is no truth and thereby committing to the claim there is truth.⁷ We can make distinctions about truth claims (following Kant, Rawls, Hilary Putnam, etc.) in the transcendental, noumenal world against truth claims made in the phenomenal world of appearances. In this scenario, the transcendental world is distinguished against and exists independently from the world as we experience it, where it remains unconditioned by the categories we impose on the empirical,

⁶ Michel Foucault, “Truth and Juridical Forms” in *Essential Works of Foucault vol. III: Power*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000), 4.

⁷ See Ken Gemes, “Nietzsche’s Critique of Truth” in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* vol. 52 no. 1 (1992): 48.

phenomenal world. Nietzsche does, of course, take a stand against the concept of a noumenal world and of things-in-themselves, also denying the inevitability of Kantian categories in their a priori status. While Nietzsche was certainly responding to the Kantian problematic, many thorough expositions of this relationship have been done and to continue placing the philosophical Kant in the center of Nietzsche's project is to miss an important part of his interrogation of truth. Instead, I will briefly look at the rhetorical function of Nietzsche's assertions on truth and the ways in which it addresses the paradoxical nature of the question he himself poses.

To begin with, the rhetorical importance of truth for Nietzsche lies in its suppressive power over the self and others. The invocation of truth or of god is for Nietzsche primarily a means of escaping responsibility and the denial of the individual will. So when Christians attribute reality as a product of God's will or when the positivists attribute their affirmation of the world to sensory experience, what they are effectively saying is, "I do not believe this because I choose to, because this kind of belief suits me, I believe this because that is how things are and hence I cannot choose otherwise *and neither can you.*"⁸ Adherence to a truth other than your own, then, is only a means of escaping your responsibility for the world. The very idea of truth itself must be if we are to claim our responsibility: we believe what we believe simply because it is said to be true because we lack the courage — the will to power — to claim existence as our own. In the *Gay Science*, Nietzsche tells us in a section titled "Believers and their need to believe" that a faith is needed, a backbone or something to fall back on, to counter the 'instinct to weakness' and provide firmness to that which one clings to. A faith that is

always coveted most and needed most urgently where will is lacking; for will, as the affect of command, is the decisive sign of sovereignty and strength. In other words, the less one knows how

⁸ Gemes, 50, emphasis original.

to command, the more urgently once covets someone who commands, who commands severely — a god, prince, class, physician, father confessor, dogma, or party conscience.⁹

The importance of truth as lack of will for Nietzsche is that truth then becomes a means for conformity and, ultimately, coercion and uniformity in belief. The ready example, of course, being Christianity: “in reality there has been only one Christian, and he died on the Cross ... What was called ‘Evangel’ from this moment onwards was already the opposite of what *he* had lived.”¹⁰ A lack of will and the self-divestment of personal assertions and creations results in the production of powerful rhetorical tools with the aim of the subjugation of the self and others, where the force of ‘it’s the truth’, or ‘it’s what’s natural’, or even ‘it’s God’s will’ far outweighs the persuasive force of ‘because I said so’. Truth for Nietzsche is always created and never discovered, faith and belief being yet another human event and adaptation to one’s surroundings. There is no Platonic harmony with transcendent and eternal forms, for Nietzsche, there is only the way we view the world and adopt certain modes of existence. When a group of individuals come to share a common view, it is not a harmonic resonance with pre-established certainties but the establishment of the very view one subscribes to. Such passive acceptance is scoffed at by ‘genuine philosophers,’ whose very task “demands that he *create values*” and who “*are commanders and legislators: [who] say ‘thus it shall be’ ... Their ‘knowing’ is creating, their creation is a legislation, their will to truth is — will to power.*”¹¹

In this way, certainly among others, Nietzsche questions the value of truth; or, more specifically, the value of the truth we have chosen to hold on to. He separates the pragmatic, practical utility of a practice from its relation to truth in order to devalue the truth property in such relationships. For all the value our current beliefs may hold, he tells us, “it would still be

⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), §347.

¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), §39.

¹¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), §211, emphasis original.

possible that a higher and more fundamental value for life might have to be ascribed to deception, selfishness, and lust.”¹² Those social practices which have higher pragmatic values — higher utility — are seen as practices closer to the truth, as demonstrated in its species-preserving ability, but once we have separated truth value from the practical application — the mode of lifestyle, the connection between the harmony of the soul and the harmony of Forms — we can begin to question the value of the lifestyle choice itself now that it is not tied to the coercive power of truth. As Tracy Strong reminds us, Nietzsche argues that “many of the moral traits that the society regards and teaches men to regard as virtuous and life-preserving are precisely *life-giving in terms of the particular society*.”¹³ For Nietzsche this means that, insofar as these traits serve to preserve a society that they need to be done away with, otherwise that society will continually provide itself with practices that maintain these preservational truths.

Nietzsche tells us that “truth is the kind of error without which a certain species of life could not live. The value for *life* is ultimately decisive.”¹⁴ When he states that “Facts [are] precisely what there is not, only interpretations,”¹⁵ so he is not claiming an inaccurate description of worldly facts or a false empirical representation. He elaborates further, asserting that “a belief can be a condition of life and nonetheless be false.”¹⁶ Through practical application and exercise of truths we create a manageable world — a stable, consistent, and predictable world — but in managing our world we must choose one path over another, one form of utility over another. The error, then, consists in over-valuing the chosen form of utility — the truth — to the detriment of the possible alternatives. Even science, the typical counterweight to Christian morality, is only

¹² Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §2.

¹³ Tracy Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 254. Emphasis original.

¹⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), §493, emphasis original.

¹⁵ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §481.

¹⁶ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §483.

another false dichotomy for Nietzsche. He tells us that “in every department science needs an ideal value a power which creates values, and in whose *service it can believe* in itself” and that “its relation to the ascetic ideal is not in itself antagonistic; speaking roughly, it rather represents the progressive force in the inner evolution of that ideal.”¹⁷ The cost of such truths being erroneously propped up goes beyond its will-stultifying effects discussed earlier, but it also precludes the dynamic nature of alternatives as a means for advancing different forms of life. We can further particular kinds of life (Christian, positivist, democratic, etc.) and a particular type of subject, Nietzsche asserts, but is this the type of life we wish to promote?

It is important here to recall that Nietzsche is not himself formulating anything resembling a theory of truth — he has no definition of truth — and his interest in truth lies in its rhetorical effects, not in determining the *validity* of moral claims. He attacks notions of truth as a means of attacking the historically contingent downstream implications that result from certain conceptions of truth. Utilitarianism, positivism, and Christianity are all the products of beliefs about the relationship between the true and the good; they are the ends that he wishes to attack, but Nietzsche cannot simply attack these conceptions as such by claiming that they prevent *his* conceptions of emancipation — the Christian will gladly deny an earthly liberation for an eternal salvation and the utilitarian may decide less freedom is what’s best for the greater good. Nietzsche is not simply trying to introduce a new truth, a new non-metaphysical world, as if we could simply turn our backs on the old way of thinking and of being. It is through his genealogical approach that he confronts certain ends by dismantling the historical contingencies that gave rise to their very conditions of possibility. What is needed is to understand these conditions of possibility, to work through them and overcome them, so as to root them out.

¹⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Horace Samuel (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2006), Essay III §25.

In asking us what presuppositions we make when assuming dichotomous relationships like knowledge/ignorance, good/evil, and true/false,¹⁸ Nietzsche is posing a more fundamental question to us, one of the relation of things, their essences, and our perception of them. Nietzsche claims a discord between objects/notions and our concepts of them, a problem partially rooted in our belief in essences: speaking to the ‘simplification’ of knowledge Nietzsche asserts, “only on this now solid, granite foundation of ignorance could knowledge rise so far — the will to knowledge on the foundation of a far more powerful will: the will to ignorance, to the uncertain, to the untrue! Not as its opposite, but — as its refinement!”¹⁹ If, however, our conceptions of the world aren’t capturing the essence of preexisting knowledge of a thing-in-itself, what are we capturing? What is our relation to things? Nietzsche, of course, compels us towards mistrust when it comes to idealisms and ‘things-in-themselves’, claiming we are not familiar with such things but rather with their effects which are, in turn, themselves merely the product of still other effects. Similarly to truth itself, Nietzsche posits mistrust that things themselves exist: there is no ‘doer behind the deed’, only the action²⁰ where “a ‘thing’ is the sum of its effects, synthetically united by a concept, an image”²¹ such that things have no constitution in themselves, but only through the effects of other objects.²²

In “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense,” Nietzsche tells us that it is only man as the ‘genius of construction’ that allows us — in fact assigns us the duty — to “lie according to a fixed convention, to lie with the herd and in a manner binding upon everyone;”²³ that is, to employ the truth, through the use of perceptual metaphors. We separate ourselves from the

¹⁸ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §34.

¹⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §24.

²⁰ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Essay I §13.

²¹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §551.

²² Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §559.

²³ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense,” in *The Nietzsche Reader*, edited by Keith Ansell Pearson and Duncan Large (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 117.

animals by our ability to discover knowledge, by our ability to create typologies and to order the world around us. Our ability to abstract from ‘vivid first impressions’ and place perceptual metaphors into schemas through the creation of laws, castes, orders, ranks, and privileges places us in the position to confront “that other vivid world of first impressions as more solid, more universal, better known, and more human than the immediately perceived world,”²⁴ and thus we dissolve the image into a concept. It is upon foundations as stable as ‘running water’ that we construct such metaphors — such truths and essences. Such manufactured knowledge, however, contains nothing which could be considered true-in-itself, for “when someone hides something behind a bush and for looks for it again in the same place and finds it there as well, there is not much praise in such seeking and finding.”²⁵

Forgetfulness plays a crucial role in this movement from observation through schema and on to truth for it is only by forgetting our primitive world of metaphors that we provide a stable and predictable world for ourselves: we forget that our perceptual metaphors are in fact metaphors and we take them as things-in-themselves. It is “in accordance with habits which are centuries old; and precisely *by means of this unconsciousness* and forgetfulness he [man] arrives at his sense of truth.”²⁶ It is not true for Nietzsche that the essences of things *appear* in the empirical world; further, there is no causality and no expression between things in the world — between subject and object — but, at most, “an aesthetic relation.”²⁷ Only through the continual repetition and use of metaphor, when

the same image has been generated millions of times and has been handed down for many generations and finally appears on the same occasion every time for all mankind, then it acquires at last the same meaning for men it would have if it were the sole necessary image and if the relationship of the original nerve stimulus to the generated image were a strictly causal one.²⁸

²⁴ Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense,” 118.

²⁵ Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense,” 118.

²⁶ Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense,” 117. Emphasis original.

²⁷ Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense,” 119.

²⁸ Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense,” 119.

The ‘unhistorical’, that which has been forgotten, is what makes life possible for Nietzsche — possible, importantly, for the herd. Addressing the problem of forgetfulness for Nietzsche in a different way, Tracy Strong discusses the paths of *ressentiment*, slave morality, and the implication of histories on present actions. *Ressentiment* is, we are reminded, the process of blaming the outside world for one’s pain and suffering and that slave morality, for Nietzsche, stems from the “*ressentiment* of natures that are denied the true reaction, that of deeds, and compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge;”²⁹ that which says ‘no’ to the creative deed, thereby making any action a *reaction*. Whereas *ressentiment* stultifies the actions of the weak, the noble man immediately responds through action to his affects and is therefore not poisoned by *ressentiment*: the noble nature is able to effectively deal with his affect through immediate action and is therefore not permanently shaped by having to react. Importantly, “for the noble man, the past does not present itself as a problem; the will of the noble man is in no way trapped by what he has been.”³⁰

This matters because Nietzsche’s will to power works by assimilating the new under the forms of the old, and, as Strong points out, “it is the *manner* in which the new is assimilated which is first important, not the *specifics* that have been assimilated.”³¹ The manner of appropriating and being able to effectively deal with the past — with histories, affects, and truths — is vital when considering the paths of *ressentiment* because “the past that will not let a man live in the present is the past of *ressentiment* and of slave morality.”³² Within this behavior, for Nietzsche, lies the genealogical path to bad conscience. *Ressentiment*, where the outside world is blamed as the source of personal suffering, promotes a slave morality where these old instincts

²⁹ Nietzsche *On the Genealogy of Morals*, I §10 cited in Strong, *Politics of Transfiguration*, 246.

³⁰ Strong, *Politics of Transfiguration*, 246.

³¹ Strong, *Politics of Transfiguration*, 247, emphasis original.

³² Strong, *Politics of Transfiguration*, 247.

are not simply dismissed once ‘the herd’ has achieved its gradual victory over the master morality. Once political and psychological walls have been erected to protect from the brutality of the outside world, the old instincts have no place to go and must seek ‘subterranean gratification’ — that is, we turn them back on ourselves, marking the beginning of the bad conscience. Man now sees himself as the cause of his own suffering and must find a way of saving himself from himself.³³ We can now see the dramatic importance of the effects of memory and forgetfulness on our conceptions about the world and importantly on the way those conceptions inform the cultivation — and limits — of individual agency as well as the urgency in Nietzsche’s assertion that the “hardening and congealing of a metaphor guarantees absolutely nothing concerning its necessity and exclusive justification.”³⁴

Nietzsche’s Critique of Knowledge and its Subjects

For Nietzsche and those followers who take seriously the challenge that Nietzsche poses not to history but to our present, the task is, in part, to expose the systems of truths and falsities that define programs of exclusion and repression: in short, systems of domination. How is one to actualize the theoretical with the practical dimensions of the task at hand? “The prison as an institution is for many the tip of the iceberg. The visible part is the rationale: ‘We need prisons because there are criminals.’ The hidden part is the biggest, the most fearsome part: the prison is an instrument of social repression...”³⁵ According to Foucault, we saw the institutions without really *seeing* them: we saw the insane, but not the *madness*; we saw the deviant, but not the *sexuality*. What is needed, then, is a return to the question of truth and to the question of acceptability, a return to those things we tolerate in order to address a perceived social need —

³³ See Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, II §16 and Strong, *Politics of Transfiguration*, 249.

³⁴ Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense,” 120.

³⁵ Foucault cited in “The Louvain Lectures in Context” by Fabienne Brion and Bernard E. Harcourt in Michel Foucault, *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling: The Function of Avowal in Justice*, trans. Stephen W. Sawyer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 279.

e.g. prisons for the criminals — so as to destabilize the ‘common sense’ and apparent truths that are the conditions of possibility for such systems of domination. The result of such systems of domination is the production of certain types of subjects. What interests me is how, through various historical mechanisms and under various functions of powers, we come to constitute ourselves as subjects. In other words, how we as individuals, by ourselves or with the help of others, act on our own modes of conduct, our own bodies, our own souls, ordering our thoughts so as to transform ourselves into an ideal, in the various forms that might take.

To address the hold that identification through certain discourses of truth has on the way one becomes a subject, I turn to the Nietzschean concept of perspectivism and offer a closer look at the role his perspective theory of affects plays in his critique of epistemology. For many, Nietzsche’s perspectivism falls *into* or *under* accounts of how knowledge of the world is possible, whether or not it’s possible at all, etc. and his “epistemological position” is generally tied to his accounts of existence of truth, notably his engagement with Kant’s thing-in-itself. But we have good reason to doubt Nietzsche was merely making another set of epistemological claims, alongside Hegel, Kant, and all the rest. We can read him as doing something all together different. If epistemology is the study of knowledge that discriminates justified belief from mere opinion, concerned with the source(s) and condition(s) of knowledge, and, importantly, that which seeks objectivity from the knowing subject, then in order to establish permanent schema for inquiry into knowledge, epistemology must free itself from the subjective world of the knower, from his or her particular cultural and social situation. Nietzsche’s perspectivism does not approach knowledge this way; he offers instead a *fundamental innovation* where “in the place of ‘moral values,’” he places “purely naturalistic values”: “in the place of ‘epistemology,’ a

perspective theory of affects.”³⁶ His perspectivism subsumes epistemology. It is through this move that Nietzsche separates himself from traditional notions of knowledge and traditional notions of the subject of knowledge. Knowledge for Nietzsche cannot be grounded by any attempts made by epistemological positions. Notions of grounding knowledge in objectivity — that is separated from and independent of the subject — are unachievable because they stem from flawed notions of the self. Perspectivism, then, is Nietzsche’s claim to understanding that does not posit any particular subject of knowledge (against the Cartesian *cogito*, Kantian mental schemas, etc.).

An illuminating textual conversation between Tracy Strong and Alexander Nehamas provides insight into the role of Nietzsche’s perspectivism in his claims against epistemology. Nehamas’ position is, succinctly put, that Nietzsche alternated or confused two positions on perspectivism — immanent and transcendent perspectivism — and that only one contained anything philosophically interesting. Nehamas describes immanent perspectivism as the understanding that, while the world is structured and governed by rules that are knowable to humans, it is the nature of understanding and of the world that the world cannot be exhausted by accounts of understanding. Transcendent perspectivism, on the other hand, asserts a specifically human perspective and that this human perspective is untranslatable to the perspective of any other species. The thrust of Nehama’s argument is that these two positions are irreconcilable, something Strong takes issue with. Nehamas’ position, Strong tells us, carries with it the conclusions that Nietzsche’s transcendental “human” perspectivism advocates a securely grounded basis for human knowledge and carries the implication for Nietzsche that knowing the world constitutes a reduction of the world to something less than it *is* and that knowledge is therefore flawed, as well as describing perspectivism as something a subject *has*. Nehamas

³⁶ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §462.

claims that for Nietzsche “physical realities are ... fundamentally flawed and take us no closer to understanding real nature,”³⁷ which Strong believes misses the mark asserting that “the implication that there is a flaw and the implication that there is a ‘real nature’ are misleading.”³⁸ Nehamas is commenting on a passage from Nietzsche’s *Will to Power* where he is discussing the perspective of physicists³⁹ or, more accurately, the presuppositions of physicists where the ‘apparent world’ is reduced to the ‘true world’ according to their own fashion. In this passage Nietzsche tells us, however, that they are in error. In their determination of the ‘true world’ the physicist forgot to take into consideration the perspective-setting force (i.e. the subject), that “*necessary* perspectivism by virtue of which every center of force — and not only man — construes all the rest of the world from its own viewpoint.”⁴⁰ It is the nature of a physicist to come to atomic conclusions about the world, but we forget that atoms themselves are constructions.

This does not mean, however, that the world is simply something we create by labeling it in various ways as if it appears *to us*. The understanding that knowledge appears to the subject is precisely what Nietzsche seeks to undermine in his critique of the apparent world. If knowledge *appears* (i.e. is discovered) *for* the subject, then there has to be a subject prior to knowledge. The insightfulness that comes from Strong’s reading are the implications this passage has on the way we approach knowledge and its relation to a knowing subject. Strong notes that Nietzsche is not saying that physics itself is flawed, but rather that physics as a science cannot claim to be the foundation for other knowledge: “Physics, like any form of understanding, requires a knowing subject, in this case one what we call physics. Physicists are what we are in the conversation of

³⁷ Alexander Nehamas, “Immanent and Transcendent Perspectivism in Nietzsche,” in *Nietzsche-Studien*, XII (Berlin: Gruyter, 1983): 473-490 cited in Strong, *Politics of Transfiguration*, 298.

³⁸ Strong, *Politics of Transfiguration*, 298.

³⁹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §636.

⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §636.

humankind when we do physics.”⁴¹ Perspectivism for Nietzsche does not mean — as it is so commonly taken to be — that all meaning is purely subjective and relative to one’s point of view, because even this is interpretation. He is not claiming that any sort of limits set by human nature or of knowledge itself tethers knowledge; instead, knowledge exists because of, and is structured by, the way we take hold of things and enter them into relations of power. The subject, for Nietzsche, “is not something given, it is something added and invented and projected behind what there is ... [i]n so far as the word ‘knowledge’ has any meaning, the world is knowable; but it is *interpretable* otherwise, it has no meaning behind it, but countless meanings. — ‘Perspectivism.’”⁴²

Something altogether different

In questioning the presuppositions of the empirical knowledge maintained by modern sciences we can interrogate their relationships to traditional Western philosophical practices, themselves rooted in discourses on truth. Foucault’s rereading of Nietzsche is helpful in this regard in that he recovers Nietzsche, I believe, from the Heideggerian understanding. Nietzsche places genealogy and knowledge in close proximity, but what are we to make of this proximity? Is his genealogy of knowledge still a knowledge or is it the destruction of knowledge? By rooting knowledge in genealogy Nietzsche calls the subject into question, as we have seen. It is this vein that Foucault pursues in his *Lectures on the Will to Know* — not so much the subversion of values that Nietzsche suggests, but the effects of a genealogy on the subject of knowledge that lies at the core of Platonism and the Western tradition. A tradition of linking the subject and knowledge that Heidegger, of course, doesn’t believe Nietzsche escaped from.

⁴¹ Strong, *Politics of Transfiguration*, 298.

⁴² Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §481. Emphasis original.

For Heidegger, “[t]he question about the essence of knowledge, as the question about what is true and truth, is a question about beings.”⁴³ Nietzsche, by posing the genealogical question of value, attempts to do away with knowledge as a faculty or essence and instead asks us, in a sense, who is speaking and by what right? The first section of *Beyond Good and Evil* opens by asking: “what questions has this will to truth not laid before us! What strange, wicked, questionable questions! ... Is it any wonder that we should finally become suspicious, lose patience, and turn away impatiently? that we should finally learn from this Sphinx to ask questions, too? Who is it that really puts questions to us here? What in us really wants ‘truth’?”⁴⁴ But it is in the very relationship between the *who* and the *what* that Heidegger finds Nietzsche’s metaphysical foundations: the Nietzschean subject is, for Heidegger, the site of the amalgamated will to knowledge, being, and will to power. The Western tradition from Heraclitus and Parmenides to Aristotle, Descartes, and Kant, Heidegger tells us, is riddled with theories of knowledge. The ‘sultry air’ of which could have been moved on from if Nietzsche had not become dependent on it himself: “If Nietzsche’s thought of will to power is the fundamental thought of his metaphysics and the last thought of western metaphysics, then the essence of knowledge, that is, the essence of truth, must be defined in terms of will to power.”⁴⁵

It is Heidegger’s reading of, among other texts, Nietzsche’s *The Will to Power* that he places the notion of knowledge within the framework of the will to power and his interpretation of Nietzschean being. Framework of being here is an important aspect of Heidegger’s thinking on Nietzsche: “‘Not “to know” but to schematize.’ ... This means that to know is not ‘to know’ — namely, in the supposed sense of a receptive, imitative copy ... this interpretation of

⁴³ Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche Vol. III The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics*, ed. David Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 24.

⁴⁴ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §1. Emphasis mine.

⁴⁵ Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. III p. 24.

knowledge as ‘schematizing’ abides with Platonic-Aristotelian thought in the same region of decision, even though Nietzsche did not ‘get’ the concept of schema *historiologically*, by looking up past opinions, from Aristotle.”⁴⁶ Where Heidegger places Nietzsche in the realm of traditional metaphysics, Foucault puts Nietzsche on a separate trajectory by differentiating him from the Aristotelian tradition in *Lectures on the Will to Know* by identifying a will to knowledge that is disparate from a will to power and by separating truth from the subject.

Foucault begins his *Lectures on the Will to Know* with an exposition of Aristotelian conceptions of the origins and nature of truth and knowledge. Making his way through Aristotle’s work, Foucault’s emphasis is on ensuring an understanding of the Western tradition as founded by the notions set forth by Aristotle. With a passage from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, Foucault begins his analysis: “All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness, they are loved for themselves; and above all others the sense of sight.”⁴⁷ Foucault’s analysis reveals two things: 1) that knowledge exists at the root of the desire for knowledge and importantly prior to it; and 2) that sensation was legitimate knowledge, for Aristotle, because it had access to truth in terms of things-in-themselves, that we can take pleasure in the sensation because sensation presents itself to us as knowledge of truth in itself (contemplation), and that such pleasure is linked to the very uselessness of the sensation — that it is not merely a survival function, but that it is connected to truth. The desire for knowledge and knowledge itself, then, takes place in truth. There has to be truth “because it is already a question of truth in the desire that the desire can be desire for knowledge.”⁴⁸ Aristotle emphasizes the will to know as being the precondition of knowledge

⁴⁶ Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol. III p. 71. Emphasis original.

⁴⁷ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, in *The Complete Work of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, trans. W.D. Ross (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), Vol. II, 1552.

⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, *Lectures on the Will to Know*, ed. Daniel Defert, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave

itself and that the desire to know is, at the same time, subsumed in its entirety by knowledge. The implication being that “knowledge (savior) and desire are not in two different places, possessed by two subjects or two powers, but that the one who desires knowledge is already the one who possess it...”⁴⁹ The desire to know for Aristotle is by its very nature something belonging to knowledge and, further, because truth commands both knowledge and desire, their relationship to the subject is the same — the subject of desire and the subject of knowledge are one and the same.

It is with Nietzsche that we can see the undoing of this desire/knowledge/truth relationship and where we see the parsing out and extraction of a will to know from forms of knowledge. For the Western tradition it is the actualization of one’s nature that one will, eventually, end up knowing. Further, it is specifically without violence, appropriation, and struggle that the movement to knowledge is obtained. Foucault, on the other hand, employs Nietzsche through a genealogy of truth, asserting that via the invention of truth, truth relates to the will to knowledge “under the form of constraint and domination... not liberty but violence.”⁵⁰ It is via Nietzsche that we can see Foucault’s exploration of the “real struggles and relations of domination [that] are involved in the will to truth”⁵¹ and the political, contingent struggles that reside behind Western conceptions of ahistorical and politically neutral knowledge-for-its-own-sake (the pleasure of the useless sensation) which he utilizes to expound upon the *madness* which produces the insane and the *sexuality* that produces the deviant, and the *violence* that produces the hero.

Macmillan, 2013), 22-24.

⁴⁹ Foucault, *Lectures on the Will to Know*, 16. See also page 24.

⁵⁰ Foucault, *Lectures on the Will to Know*, 206.

⁵¹ Foucault, *Lectures on the Will to Know*, 2.

Knowledge as an invention means that knowledge is not inherent in human nature, that there is no ‘knowledge instinct’, and that, above all, the possibility and potential for knowledge is not restricted by its form. The possibility of knowledge does not follow any formal form or structure, any transcendent reason but, rather, behind knowledge “there is something altogether different, something foreign, opaque, and irreducible to it.”⁵² There is no external or eternal guarantee of knowledge rooted in Forms or a divine intellect, nor does knowledge precede itself so as to be recalled from memory as Plato would have it. It is not an *apparent* entity awaiting our discovery of self-evidence and/or a description serving as an unlocking, a decryption of nature to be made sense of. Knowledge, then, is a product — a violence as the effect of operations colliding and struggling with each other. Nietzsche tells us in §333 of the *Gay Science*, titled “The meaning of knowing,” that it is only “the last scenes of reconciliation and the final accounting at the end of this long process rise to our consciousness, we suppose that *intelligere* must be something conciliatory, just, and good — something that stands essentially opposed to the instincts, while it is actually nothing but a *certain behavior of the instincts toward one another*.”⁵³ Whereas the Western tradition had long considered consciousness as thought itself, Nietzsche tells us it has only recently come to light that the “greatest part of our spirit’s activity remains unconscious and unfelt” and that it is the function of the instincts vying with and against each other that gives rise to conscious thought. The activity of these instincts contending with one another “may well be the source of that sudden and violent exhaustion that afflicts all thinkers (it is the exhaustion on a battlefield). Indeed, there may be occasions of concealed

⁵² Michel Foucault, “Lecture on Nietzsche,” in *Lectures on the Will to Know*, ed. Daniel Defert, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 203.

⁵³ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §333. Emphasis original.

heroism in our warring depths, but certainly nothing divine that eternally rests on itself, as Spinoza supposed.”⁵⁴

Foucault elaborates on this movement — this operation, interplay, struggle, and compromise — of the instincts that leads to knowledge: “Something is produced because the instincts meet, fight one another, and at the end of their battles finally reach a compromise. That something is knowledge.”⁵⁵ While knowledge, then, does have instincts at its foundation, it is something other than the refinement or realization of these instincts that lead to knowledge. Knowledge is instinct in confrontation, and only as an after-effect and of a completely different nature than the instincts themselves. In this way knowledge cannot be traced back to these instincts as if a derivation of a human nature because it is the combative, conflictual, and violent chance that gives rise to knowledge. As a surface effect and byproduct, as a result of the instincts, knowledge is for Nietzsche like a spark between two swords, but not a thing made of their metal.⁵⁶ This is the movement that allows Nietzsche to make the assertion that knowledge is an invention and has no origin. Against all the devices of Western philosophy, knowledge is in no way inscribed in human nature but is instead created and invented. There are many examples where Nietzsche places such invention in direct opposition to ideas of origin, natural or divine. In *On the Genealogy of Morals* he suggests workshops where ideals are manufactured⁵⁷ and where the invention of religion stems from power relations and as a product of forces. In the *Gay Science* he tells us that our opinions, “along with all proofs, refutations, and the whole intellectual masquerade, are merely symptoms of the change in taste and most certainly not what

⁵⁴ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §333. Emphasis original.

⁵⁵ Foucault, “Truth and Juridical Forms,” 8.

⁵⁶ Nietzsche quoted in Foucault, “Truth and Juridical Forms,” 8.

⁵⁷ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Essay I §14.

they are still often supposed to be, its causes.”⁵⁸ Often the result of a ‘stupid humility’ that produces in us a shirking — a cowering — that says: “I do not want to see anything that contradicts the prevalent opinion. Am *I* called to discover new truths? There are too many old ones, as it is.”⁵⁹ Lest we forget, Nietzsche is there to remind us that it is “enough to create new names and estimations and probabilities in order to create in the long run new ‘things.’”⁶⁰

This is not to say, however, that knowledge is not *something*. While knowledge does not serve as an unmasking, a revealing of an inner essence, nor does it itself sit at the level of *mere* appearance. Foucault tells us that “knowledge is indeed what goes beyond appearance, what maliciously destroys it, puts it into question, and extracts its secrets;” it is against appearances which we “set the murderous relentlessness of knowledge” keeping in mind, however, that this operation only serves to give rise to new appearances so as to set them against — and beyond — one another.⁶¹ Two great things are at stake with Nietzsche: the break of knowledge and being and the break of knowledge with the good. These breaks have important implications for the relationship between knowledge and truth as well — if knowledge is invention, then truth, too, becomes a secondary product of invention. In the scientific, positivistic sense, truth and knowledge are linked together from the start; they are different sides of the same coin. The scientific endeavor begins with the understanding that progressive knowledge coincides with progressive understanding of the truth — they are linked together in essence or by right. Knowledge is knowledge of the truth.

The proposition here is that knowledge is not destined for truth but instead consists in and of the struggle, the conflict, and the violence of this ‘altogether different’, where truth is

⁵⁸ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §39.

⁵⁹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §25, emphasis original.

⁶⁰ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §58.

⁶¹ Foucault, “Lecture on Nietzsche,” 205-6.

something added later. By calling knowledge-in-itself into question,⁶² Nietzsche is delineating himself from those making yet another epistemological claim set within the subject-object distinction. In the violence of knowledge we don't see consistent relationships or specific activities: not to truth, not to utilitarian calculations, nor to religious configurations. Instead, to deny knowledge in-itself means for Nietzsche that "the subject-object relation (and all its derivatives like the a priori, objectivity, pure knowledge, constitutive subject) is not the foundation of knowledge but is in reality produced by it."⁶³ Where Western thought tasks knowledge with the merging of the subject and the object, a bringing closer together through understanding, domination, etc., Nietzsche distances the subject and the object relating them to each other only as products of conceptions of truths. The subject-object distinction cannot, then, be the founding of a *cogito* or thing-in-itself (including knowledge) because the very positing of the subject and the object stem from the illusion of knowledge. Knowledge as systems of relations and the interplay of differences without the foundational subject-object distinction to fall back on is why, for Nietzsche, knowledge consists of something altogether different.

Agency and Illusion

Nietzsche pursues meaning through practical experience in the world, which, he believes, allows for a fragmentation of rigid social and political structures, asserting a politics of individual agency with and through a communal intersubjectivity. Nietzsche put this conception of meaning and truth to us, in part, with his collapse of the *real* and the *apparent* into the realm of the fable and what Nietzsche calls his "perspective theory of affect." Of the many places to dive into Nietzsche's construction of the world as fable, and the most relevant for my purposes

⁶² Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Essay III §12. Nietzsche says: "But let us, forsooth, my philosophic colleagues, henceforward guard ourselves more carefully against this mythology of dangerous ancient ideas, which has set up a 'pure, will-less, painless, timeless subject of knowledge'; let us guard ourselves from the tentacles of such contradictory ideas as 'pure reason,' 'absolute spirituality,' 'knowledge-in-itself' ..."

⁶³ Foucault, "Lecture on Nietzsche," 210.

here, might be his critique of Kantian epistemology and the pursuit of ‘pure’ knowledge. Strong tells us that in Nietzsche’s view, “the desire to hold on to the world of theoretical reason and the persistence in the belief that reason and logic are simple vehicles for striving after ‘truth’ leads to a division of the world into ‘real’ and ‘apparent’.”⁶⁴ Nietzsche directly addresses this division of existence into the real and apparent in a passage within *Twilight of the Idols* entitled “The History of an Error” that culminates with the death of god and the abolition of the ‘real world’: “We have abolished the real world: what world is left? The apparent world perhaps? ... But no! *with the real world we have also abolished the apparent world!*”⁶⁵ Here Nietzsche demonstrates his position as a thinker who approaches philosophical systems and exposes their veiled and shifting meanings and foundations and where he emerges as “the thinker of interpretation, of truth and knowledge *as* interpretation, and of existence as fable.”⁶⁶

Nietzsche not only shows us the hidden prejudices of metaphysical foundations, exposing such ‘groundings’ to a transvaluation, but he offers us a way to read texts and philosophies as “systems and as symptoms of that which they do not admit;”⁶⁷ further, we are warned “that metaphysics cannot be surpassed... [b]ut Nietzsche is there to show us another way.”⁶⁸ This other way, as Jean-Luc Nancy points out, is obtained through the collapse of the *real/apparent* dichotomy and the emergence of ‘truth’ as a distinctly this-worldly experience and practice. “Philosophical systems are not read as grounding truths, but as interpretations whose grounding values can be evaluated as such, but whose status is closer to metaphor or rhetorical trope than to pure concept or timeless, abstract reason.”⁶⁹ Interpretation and transvaluation are always already

⁶⁴ Strong, *Politics of Transfiguration*, 45.

⁶⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 1968), 51.

⁶⁶ Ian James, *The Fragmentary Demand: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 19.

⁶⁷ Jean-Luc Nancy, “Nietzsche: But Do We Have the Eyes to See Him?” *Esprit* (1968), 495.

⁶⁸ Nancy, “Nietzsche,” 500.

⁶⁹ James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, 20.

in effect with any attempt at grounding or forming a philosophical foundation. Fundamental to Nietzsche's insistence on interpretation is the affirmation of existence as fable or fiction. Such a claim, while on the surface having the appearance of a grounding principle, is itself an interpretation. Instances of metaphysics or grounding in Nietzsche's thought have been pointed out (notably by Heidegger), but those thoughts are always being displaced in that they themselves are interpretations and, as such, are subject to revision and evaluation.

This position has serious implications for philosophical language and, by proximity, literature. If no philosophical language can be anything more than infinite interpretations, a work of fiction, then there can be no definitive truths posited by the long line of thinkers attempting to define such truths. This erodes the delineation philosophical thinkers have long attempted to establish between their work of 'pure' forms, sayings, and Ideals and that of literature. There does not exist, Nietzsche claims, a realm of pure reason that is untouched by the effects of interpretation; the only form of reason that is possible is that of practical reason.⁷⁰ It is for this reason that philosophical language can never reach the sought after purity in discursive form over the loose constructs of literary style.

Conclusion

The absence of meaning is what compels us to strive for interpretations, but is also what keeps us from finding what might be called a true meaning. Nietzsche is weary of cultural interpretations for many reasons, the most important being the impossibility of determining a fixed interpretation or a 'true' essence. Once the pursuit of an essence has been moved away from, space opens up to talk about interpretations in a more serious manner. This is what existence as fable means for Nietzsche. Because existence is fable and there cannot be any 'pure' sayings, only interpretations, philosophical exposition (expressions of truth) must be constructed

⁷⁰ Strong, *Politics of Transfiguration*, 47.

in discourse. For this reason, language plays a significant role in Nietzsche's account of epochal determination of cultural construction of agency. Culture is problematic, in part because it is constrained by the demands of practice in historically situated contexts; such practices include the use of language, which Nietzsche openly distrusts. We can judge cultures, Nietzsche believes, based on how they organize subjective power in relation to such practical experiences. Central to Nietzsche's position is the claim that all interpretations and valid, authoritative, and successful forms of agency are contingent upon meaningful practice. For this reason, some cultures are more desirable than others: "in some cases cultures serve the conflicting demands of their context in such a way that they organize power as agency. Others may serve ideological functions, blocking, masking, or displacing potentials for agency."⁷¹ Again, what is problematic for Nietzsche is not determining which experiences are real and which are illusory, but rather how humans as agents cognitively process these experiences.

Critical for any understanding of how Nietzsche judges interpretations and how he addresses the cognitive processes of human experiences, is his 'perspective theory of the affects.' What is important to Nietzsche in this regard is not a concern with whether or not any experience or thing is real or illusion (though his position on this dichotomy has been touched on), but rather what worldly experiences can be identified as successful performances by our forms of consciousness. According to Mark Warren, Nietzsche asserts that we are justified in holding our beliefs and statements if, "having acted on them, experimented with them, or otherwise used them to formulate agency, we find they do not violate the self-reflective motive of power, the requirements of intelligibility, or the exigencies of the social and physical world."⁷² Nietzsche,

⁷¹ Mark Warren, *Nietzsche and Political Thought* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1988), 47.

⁷² Warren, *Nietzsche and Political Thought*, 64.

then, judges ideas based on an empowering of individual agents and how those agents are constituted within a greater cultural framework, and not on relationships to fundamental truth.

Significant in the argument for existence as fable, then, are the epochal constitution of individual agents and the changing nature of the demands made on individuals by their culture and by the effects of history. For a culture or a given heritage to influence present day notions of agency, interpretations must have first been constituted as historically practical; that is, those practices employed under existing historical conditions. This is to be achieved in two ways: first, “interpretations, if they do not actively formulate material exigencies of life (as many mystical, mythical, primitive, and religious interpretations do not), must at least not conflict with them to the degree that the individuals embodying the interpretations become extinct. Second, beyond these minimal requirements, interpretations are selectively delimited by having to serve the self-reflexive function of constituting individuals as agents.”⁷³

Warren breaks down Nietzsche’s ‘perspective theory of the affects’ into three demands that must be met if interpretations are to be regarded as authoritative:⁷⁴ First, because all language is inherently polysemic, Nietzsche places great emphasis on regional linguistic constructs, specifically on grammar. Therefore, an interpretation must be “*intelligent and coherent* in terms of grammar” (emphasis original). Second, an interpretation must be “*legitimate* in terms of historical experience” (emphasis original). In other words, it must coincide with the ‘testimony of the senses’ and the demands Nietzsche makes on practicality. Finally, “an appropriate and authoritative interpretation must become an element of a practice, and produce effects permitting a self-interpretation of agency” — the feeling and practice of empowerment.

⁷³ Warren, *Nietzsche and Political Thought*, 146.

⁷⁴ Warren, *Nietzsche and Political Thought*, pages 97-98.

What this means in terms of intersubjectivity is that we can't think along the lines of traditional community building because to do so would be an attempt to define something that necessarily resists interpretation. Nietzsche's discussion of the collapse of the real and the apparent and the construction of existence as fable has facilitated attempts to demonstrate a view of community and human interaction that consists of an essential non-essence, of an unstable center that resists definition and interpretation. This results in a fragmented politics that works against traditional notions of communal identities and cultural direction. Warren notes Nietzsche's fragmentary conception of culture: "Nietzsche can only suggest what outlines a new culture might actually take... Any other means of suggestion — say, a blueprint of a new culture — would violate Nietzsche's insight into the nature of culture ... thus a new culture cannot be designated in advance: it is simply not that kind of thing."⁷⁵ Like literature, the meaning of community cannot be determined in advanced or even held to be consistent from one interpretation to the next. Community becomes the withdrawal of meaning — as an excess of meaning — that opens the door to different possibilities.

The implication of Foucault's *power/knowledge* relationship is that subjects do not exist in the world as pre-given entities, but are the products of power relations incorporated into social practices. Claims to the legitimate use of violence and the downstream categories of 'heroism,' 'barbarism,' 'justice,' and 'terrorism' are the results of the concrete conflicts over truth in discursive practices. A critique of dominant conceptions of redemptive violence requires the exposure of power relations and their constitutive role in violent practices founded on truths that divide populations with varying claims to legitimate uses of violence.

Important to any discussion of violence is the role the body plays. In the next chapter, I continue the interrogation of dominant discursive practices as they concern assumptions of truth

⁷⁵ Warren, *Nietzsche and Political Thought*, 189.

about the bodies of the war dead. More specifically, how contemporary practices would have us physically comport ourselves around and in response to certain bodies in certain places at certain times by looking at the operation of the monument apparatus in the United States. What interests me here are the discursive practices that dominate relationships of individuals over one another also have recourse to mechanisms where individuals act upon themselves. In a similar vein, where technologies of the self are integrated into dominant practices, the task becomes to search for ways to break the hold of subjectivities produced by discourses of truth as played out in contemporary practices of the identity politics surrounding war and the war dead.

**CHAPTER FIVE:
The Disciplined Corpse Disciplines: Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, and the Response of the War
Dead**

When we share space with dead bodies we respond with certain embodied comportments. When we share space with bodies rendered dead by war violence, these embodied comportments relay certain understandings about the truths of these bodies for dominant social practices. When we approach the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall, for example, one is expected to get up close to it and it a common practice for people to trace the names they find there. Physical contact with the Wall is an inbuilt part of its function as a memorial: the reflective marble construction allows us to see ourselves in the Wall, overlaying the names of those killed in action and drawing us in, physically, into the memorial itself. We talk with those around us about who they are visiting and share stories about our experiences — trade war stories. In contrast to the physical closeness of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery sets a different memorial proximity between the viewer and the viewed. Here the visitor is purposely kept at a distance, separated from the tomb itself by uniformed guards and barriers demarcating the space around the memorial. The embodied response engendered is one of distance, of solemn reflection and abstract contemplation of those killed in action. We are silent — even to cough here will get you a sideways glance from the other visitors. We don't see our specific image mirrored over the names of other specific people but are instead encouraged towards abstract thoughts about those dead bodies that have no names and where our role in memorializing the dead takes place from afar.

These differing embodied responses to the war dead function in different ways to recreate a social space that serves to reinforce understandings about how we approach the idea of death in war and the ways we are to properly respond to those killed. My focus here is on contemporary embodied practices that address phenomenological experiences with the war dead and the placement of righteousness and redemption with the corpse itself. More specifically, I interrogate those notions of embodiment at work that make conceptions like redemptive violence possible as a system of thought as employed in contemporary practices. I employ the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who serves as an exemplar of the lived approach, and Michel Foucault, who has served as the go-to for an approach advocating social and historical inscription. Building on the work of a line of writers who utilize one as a means of countering the other, and a few that use both in collaboration, I argue that while not collapsing the distinction between the lived body and the inscribed body, the two approaches can work together to enrich the dialogue surrounding contemporary embodiment. More specifically, I believe the work of Merleau-Ponty and Foucault can provide insight into the ways in which the physical remains of the war dead operate as an important influence on American cultural formations, discursive practices, and ways of thinking about the world, especially with regard to violence.

Embodiment

Notions of embodiment and of the body in general typically involve political and social theory that argue one of two positions: that the driving force(s) that inform body politics are to be found either from within the body itself or from outside the bodily boundaries and in the social world — that the body is either acting or acted upon. Limiting ourselves to one or the other, however, to either the lived body or the historically inscribed body, is to demarcate bodily

space in ways that deny fruitful dialogue about the ways in which these two conceptions of the body are mutually informing.

To begin this discussion it is important to note that while Merleau-Ponty and Foucault are two diverse thinkers in many regards, they both begin their projects from similar motivations and a common critique of the shortcomings of Western political and philosophical thought. Their concern, among others, is the lack of overall attention to the corporeal body and, where it is noted, it is seen as a closed system, shut off from the world and from others. Additionally, and more importantly for what I address here, is the treatment of the body by both thinkers as socially and historically situated and the focus on the bodily habits and actions as expressions of historical and cultural formations. I will begin my exposition by showing how the authors developed their diverging positions from these common critiques and then show how they can be brought together to provide a fuller dialogue on the situatedness of the body. I will show how this mutually informed approach informs our current use of, and the corporeal experience of, the war dead in reinforcing existing cultural norms of redemptive and righteous violence. More than mere ready examples of a lived account or an inscribed account, Merleau-Ponty and Foucault, both individually and taken together, give us a nuanced insight into the material and discursive practices surrounding the war dead and ways in which such practices operate. That is, the ways in which the practices surrounding the war dead produce and function in society. They provide insight into how such practices constitute what we have deemed a social good that is worthy of maintaining and perpetuating, and how it is that a redemptive and righteous good became culturally and politically useful.

I will begin here from the well-tread critique of liberalism as a system of thought in which moralizing universalities and ideals operate at the level of abstraction rather than from the

world itself, where such abstraction facilitates the absolution of liberalism from its own involvement in violence and its situatedness in contingency. More developed social and political theories, from Nietzsche and Marxism to feminism and post-structuralism, purport to have the individual body and its contingencies specifically in mind. One major limitation of such theories, however, is the neglect of the ways in which concrete situations influence and are influenced by materiality itself. Where intersubjectivity at the material level is spatialized in a way that differs from the idealized body as non-presence as it is rendered in liberal politics. The lack of concern for or familiarity with the body and the ways in which it is taken for granted in everyday and “strictly political” speech is disrupted when unfamiliar bodies appear on the scene. It is thus beneficial to look at the normative ways in which the bodily interruptions of the war dead on social and political processes inform and reinforce habits of redemptive violence.

With this in mind, rather than orient or focus my examination here at the ideological or State level, I instead look at material operations within forms of subjugation and truth apparatuses of local systems and examine the connections made between them and the uses made of them. The ways in which, for example, redemptive states justify themselves in violent excursions around the globe because they practice the ideals of freedom, liberty, and democracy at home. My task here is to examine the lived experiences of the redemptive state and what that entails for its citizens and its Others and to measure these experiences against its purported principles. I pursue this not in order to evaluate the ways in which practices conform to rationalities but to explicate the rationality that is in use as it articulates a political knowledge. Finally, I aim to contrast such experiences with a different regime, one that ceaselessly interrogates itself, so that we may interact with a richer account of the agentic qualities of the

war dead in ways that disrupt the inertia of redemptive violence and reopen moments of closure that surround our thinking about violence.

Merleau-Ponty and Active Embodiment

Merleau-Ponty argues his case by attacking the traditional intellectualist conception of the human being in, among other works, *The Phenomenology of Perception*. Phenomenology, as means of existential analysis, is traditionally accused of various subjectivisms because of its reliance on notions of intentional consciousness¹ and the presentation of the world therein. Merleau-Ponty (re)defined phenomenology in a way that positions himself against the claims that phenomenology reduces experiences to thoughts about the world, as well as Cartesian claims about the world, instead arguing that we are not ‘pure thought’ set apart from world. Rather, we are always already immersed in the world. “The world is there before any possible analysis of mine,”² he tells us, and the phenomenological experience shows us that the Cogito “does not define the subject’s existence in terms of the thought he has of existing” but rather, to the contrary, “it recognizes my thought itself as an inalienable fact, and does away with any kind of idealism in revealing me as ‘being-in-the-world’.”³ The task at hand, then, is not to demonstrate how the objective world is constituted in and through consciousness — because it is not — but to examine our way of being-in-the-world.

For Merleau-Ponty, the problem of embodiment raises considerable concerns for the very notion of a mental schema as a distinct mediatory process organizing our intentional orientation in and to the world. Thought and sensation only occur as such, Merleau-Ponty argues, against a

¹ For example, the ‘conscious intending of objects’ as conceived by Husserl. See Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, ed. Dermot Moran, 2nd ed. 2 vols. (London: Routledge, 2001); and Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology* (Norwell: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1983).

² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), x.

³ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, xiv.

background of perception that we are always already understanding in bodily terms by our very engagement in the world. Our corporeal body is what undoes traditional notions of subject and object and of a transparent inner self, contrasted with an opaque 'reality' that exists outside. "The distinction between subject and object is blurred in my body (and no doubt the distinction between noesis and noema as well?)."⁴ This is because, Merleau-Ponty asserts, the intentional organization of the body is not the result of cognitive process which we can trace back to a founding Cogito. We do not have bodies as if some possession, rather "we are our body," meaning that "we are in the world through our body, and in so far as we perceive the world with our body." Further, "perceiving as we do with our body, the body is a natural self and, as it were, the subject of perception."⁵ The body in its perceptual ability is the 'I' moment and is "our general medium for having a world."⁶

As something which we can neither say to properly possess or own, the body is the agent of our perceptual acts such that we understand ourselves not as having bodies, but as being bodies.⁷ The body is the very possibility of experience while remaining on the periphery of our own perceptual awareness, never appearing simply as an object of perception. "To say that it [my body] is always near me, always there for me, is to say that it is never really in front of me, that I cannot array it before my eyes, that it remains marginal to all my perceptions."⁸ While embodied action is purposive and intelligent, it cannot be said to derive from mental acts that are prior to or separate from the actions themselves. Important in defining these embodied actions are the culturally and historically based nature of these actions. The skills we acquire for and through

⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Philosopher and His Shadow," in *Signs*, trans. R. McCleary (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 167.

⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 239.

⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 169.

⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 104-109.

⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 104.

embodied action are drawn in part from our cultural surroundings and constitute what Merleau-Ponty calls ‘habits’. This way of being-in-the-world makes our experience of the world a matter of practice and practicality. Contrary to Cartesian notions of objects existing ‘for me’, the grasp and understanding I have of the world is a practical, embodied ‘mastery’ of an environment where I “intend it practically and make use of it, attributing it a function and practical meaning, subordinating it to my practical projects.”⁹

Conceptions of habit are informed by the cultural and historical formations which individuals are always already involved, in a manner similar to a Heideggerian ‘thrownness’,¹⁰ when they account for being-in-the-world. An individual is not *in* the world as an object is in a box, rather the subject is engaged in the world through the practical grip and pre-reflexive grasp afforded by our embodied know-how. Merleau-Ponty uses soccer as an example of such bodily comportment to the world in *The Structure of Behavior*,¹¹ to describe how the players are the game and the ways in which the direction and meaning of their specific actions are determined by common cultural conventions (habits) and not by any intentional act of consciousness. The purposive movements about the field are not the result of a reflexive, conscious decision, but rather a demonstration of the ‘mastery’ of the players’ environment and a ‘feel for the game’. The embodied responses to the penalty box and the white chalk demarcating the field of play, the experience of the ball flying through the air towards you is not the product of reflexive thought but the perceptual ‘grasping’ of an environment.

The bases of our linguistic, affective, and practical forms of behavior are, for Merleau-Ponty, found in our social habits. Embodied activity, that is, our very being-in-the-world, then,

⁹ Nick Crossley, “Phenomenology, Structuralism, and History: Merleau-Ponty’s Social Theory,” in *Theoria* 103 (April 2004), 93.

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010).

¹¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behaviour* (London: Methuen, 1965), 168-9. For a detailed working through of this idea, see Nick Crossley, “Phenomenology, Structuralism, and History.”

“takes up these habitual schemas and deploys them, in situ, with competence and skill. It applies them and modifies them as and when appropriate.”¹² Essential to the notion of embodiment and ‘corporeal schema’ being described here is the integration of a set of skills that is ready-to-hand in many ways (to borrow another phrase from Heidegger) that incorporates a world prior to the formation and application of concepts and thoughts — a preconceptual ‘motor intentionality.’ Habit, then, does not exist as an inner essence or part of a strictly mental conceptual schema, but is instead manifest in the body itself such that “it is the body which ‘understands’ in the acquisition of habit.”¹³ That is, in the way, to use an example employed by Merleau-Ponty, if I am asked to touch my ear, I am able to move my hand directly to my ear without having to think about the location of either my hand or ear, the path between them, and without having to employ any reflexive thought.

In this way Merleau-Ponty sets embodied action through social and historical habits as the site of the production of meaning — importantly *through* and not *in* society. In a soccer match, the players’ action in the game depends on their understanding and comprehension of the game itself. There would be no game at all without players who knew how to play; without, that is, a sense of embodied know-how. The constitutive markers of a soccer match — the uniforms, the chalk lines, the referees, the goals at opposing end of the field, and so on — have no meaning outside of the understanding that the players have of them. In a similar fashion, it is a mistake to place ourselves in society as objects among objects in the same manner it is a mistake to appropriate society within ourselves as objects of thought: the social is not an object.

The conception of the social here is one of embodied action: intentional social actions, movement and positioning within society, are only viable insofar as they constitute a meaning

¹² Nick Crossley, “Body-Subject/Body-Power: Agency, Inscription and Control in Foucault and Merleau-Ponty,” in *Body and Society* vol. 2 (1996), 101.

¹³ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 167.

and preexisting element of society. In this way, society is a social structure existing externally, that individuals embody and then reproduce through their actions. Merleau-Ponty asserts that the “presence of structure outside us in natural and social systems and within us as a symbolic function points to a way beyond the subject-object correlation which has dominated philosophy from Descartes to Kant.”¹⁴ ‘Man is eccentric to himself’, he continues, in that a person’s actions only have meaning or substance as it relates to the rules and bodily skills and insofar as such rules and skills have been incorporated into a corporeal schema. “By showing us that man is eccentric to himself and that the social finds its centre only in man, structure particularly enables us to understand how we are in a sort of circuit with the socio-historical world.”¹⁵ The social is still centered in man, however, because there would be no social to speak of without embodied agents who have incorporated habitual skills and employ them through action. The take-away point, for Merleau-Ponty and for the discussion here, is that acquired skills in the form of corporeal habits form the basis of our being-in-the-world because we are these actions and it is only through these actions that we give meaning to and sustain the social world.

Merleau-Ponty’s view of structuralism does not lose sight of the acting, embodied subject because agent and structure are two sides of the same coin. In what he comes to call ‘institutions’, Merleau-Ponty takes into consideration, as we saw above, how the “historical ‘mutation’ of structures, a process which is constant, is strictly inexplicable if structures are not ‘centred’ in the innovative and improvised actions of man” in such a way as to “simultaneously connect us to a past and project us towards a future.”¹⁶ Social structures or institutions, then, have both a durability and a non-teleological evolution: individuals learn the particular bodily skills of an institution and, while performing those acquired skills, are constantly morphing and

¹⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 123.

¹⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 123.

¹⁶ Nick Crossley, “Phenomenology, Structuralism, and History,” 98.

transforming those ‘habits’. More properly, institutions are those “events in experience which endow it with durable dimensions, in relation to which a whole series of other experiences will acquire meaning” and the ways in which our personal and social histories intertwine. An institution is “those events which sediment in me a meaning, not just as survival or residues, but as the invitation to a sequel, the necessity of a future.”¹⁷ Included in this dynamic figuring of social structures, where history and culture are not merely objects embedded within a consciousness, is the dynamic and decentered nature of subjectivity where meaning and experience consists of a trans-historical and trans-cultural skills and engagement toward the world.

Agency for Merleau-Ponty, as we can see, is more than the acting body that is agentic to the extent that it takes up and uses habitual (conventional) forms of behavior. While the embodied subject is responsible for the production and reproduction of social and cultural formations and the particular bodily skills that accompany them, it is also dependent upon on them. In this way, the body both acts and is acted upon. The locus of all being-in-the-world is the body and it is through the body that habitual institutions connect “the subject to others and to history and society at a level which is both deeper than and prior to their individual consciousness” such that to understand human being-in-the-world is “to understand human beings as always already situated in and affected by social relations of various sorts.”¹⁸ Social and political control, then, is achieved and maintained at the corporeal level because — here demonstrating a Hegelian influence — “consciousness can do nothing without its body and can only act upon others by acting upon their bodies. It can only reduce them to slavery by making nature an appendix of its body, by appropriating nature to itself and establishing in nature its

¹⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Institution in Personal and Public History,” in *In Praise of Philosophy: Themes from the Lectures at the College de France* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 108-09.

¹⁸ Nick Crossley, “Phenomenology, Structuralism, and History,” 99-100.

instruments of power.”¹⁹ Political and social control consists in direct measures over the body which demarcate, direct, and control bodily motility and the ways in which, through the appropriation of space, bodies are both active and acted upon.

Operating not as a set of transcendental ideas but specifically as a pattern of interweaving relationships, the particular way in which we coexist is anchored in peoples’ orientation towards the world, consisting of our experience and its expression in the various activities and taken-for-granted habits that have “come to be institutionalized in [society] as the hidden principle of all its overt functioning.”²⁰ Merleau-Ponty tasks himself with the investigation of ideological regimes and the way the existential and ontological presuppositions of modernity,²¹ are played out in terms of politics. For Merleau-Ponty, “ontological presuppositions are replicated in collective life, where ideas become diffused across lifeworlds as taken-for-granted horizons for thought and action and a particular orientation is manifest across different dimensions of experience.”²²

For Merleau-Ponty, political regimes are composed of a number of interrelated components and he refers to ideologies in two disparate senses: the first sense is more neutral and refers to the taken-for-granted lifeworlds and the operation of familiar habits and practices. The second sense of ideology is used more pejoratively, specifically when used to critique regimes he disagrees with. In this sense, ideologies are seen as closed entities that resist self-critique and change while maintaining positions of privilege within fluid configurations of power

¹⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Humanism and Terror: The Communist Problem* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000), 102.

²⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 101.

²¹ Generally, the mind/body and subject/object dualism as put forth by Descartes, along with a rationalism, and its perpetuation by Kant, Hegel, Marx, among others.

²² Diana Coole, *Merleau-Ponty and Modern Politics after Anti-Humanism* (London: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 69.

and political significance.²³ Ideology is then, for Merleau-Ponty, the site of the separation between the abstract realm of values and the concrete, material lives lived in a politically contextual environment where epistemological and ontological truths become lived experiences within modes of power. That is, the ways in which we physically embody truths.

The relevance of Merleau-Ponty becomes clear when considering the situatedness of the body within dominant practices imbued with a redemptive violence as the material site of a confrontation between habits and the lived experience on one hand, and abstracted notions of epistemological truths and orientations on the other. Such orientations towards the world, consisting of our experience and its expression in various activities and taken-for-granted habits, inform our intercorporeal relationships. The rationale behind the taken-for-granted habits — the discourses surrounding the war dead and the purposeful employment of violence — normalizes violence and appropriates bodies as a means of legitimizing a closed and privileged political organization. Redemption as a presupposition is replicated in social life where individuals learn the particular bodily skills of an institution or discourse. Merleau-Ponty allows us to see the ways in which a person's actions have meaning and substance through the ways they relate to bodily skills and insofar as such rules and skills have been incorporated into a corporeal schema. Political and social control consists in direct measures over the body which demarcate, direct, and control bodily motility and the ways in which corporeal habits form the basis of our being-in-the-world because we are these actions and it is only through these actions that we give meaning to and sustain the social world.

²³ See Diana Coole, "The Dialectics of the Real," in *Ideology After Poststructuralism: Experiences of Identity in a Globalising World*, ed. S. Malesevic and I. MacKenzie (London: Pluto Press, 2002); also Diana Coole, "Ideology, Power, and Truth," in *Merleau-Ponty and Modern Politics after Anti-Humanism*.

Foucault and Sociohistorical Inscription

Critics of Merleau-Ponty's address of the crisis of modern politics usually produce a critique stemming from poststructuralist and/or anti-humanist positions that fault phenomenology itself with humanism, idealism, and an inbuilt subjectivism. In addition to this, poststructuralists are also concerned about reference to the nondiscursive or prediscursive, believing that such notions naturalize what is, at bottom, a constructed, discursive effect. With a quick look at Foucault's critique of historical materialism, however, we can see the ways in which his conceptions of power relations and the relation of the discursive to the nondiscursive, while distinct in many regards, are also similar to that of Merleau-Ponty in important ways.

Foucault offers a critical view of domination where discursive practices are not separable from power and social relations and all social practices are, themselves, transitory. Foucault rejects Marxism as a critique of political economy and as a dialectical method, and while his notions of domination can be seen as similar to historical materialism, he rejects the notion and mechanisms by which discourse is parsed from, and subordinated by, material practice. By deriving mental operations from the material world in the manner he does, Foucault believes Marx to be within the Enlightenment era problematic. Positioning himself against the Marxists economic reductionism and focus on labor and instead investigating *epistemes*, systems of knowledge and discursive practices, Foucault can "study the way in which discourse is not innocent, but shaped by practice, without privileging any form of practice such as class struggle. He can also study how discourse in turn shapes practice without privileging any form of discourse."²⁴

²⁴ Mark Poster, *Foucault, Marxism, and History: Mode of Production Versus Mode of Information* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1984), 12.

Mark Poster explains in *Foucault, Marxism, and History* that Foucault's focus is on explicating a critical theory that gets around a reduction to economic causality and instead posits a Nietzschean genealogy where totalizing centers or foundations are rejected, instead demonstrating the transitional and contingent nature of cultural formations.²⁵ Interrogating the relationship between the discursive and the nondiscursive realms of institutions, historical and political events, as well as habituated social practices is the aim of Foucault's materialism and his archeological method. Here, he seeks not to 'uncover great cultural continuities' or systems of causality, but rather "tries to determine how the rules of formation that govern it ... may be linked to nondiscursive systems: it seeks to define specific forms of articulation."²⁶ Foucault's questioning of causal logic, such as those found in Enlightenment era thinking and in Marxism, as well as his approach to structuralism led him away from a humanist approach to the social sciences towards an approach based on structural linguistics:

It is the unconscious structures of language, of the literary work, and of knowledge that one is trying at this moment to illuminate. In the second place, I think that one can say that what one is essentially looking for are the forms, the system, that is to say that one tries to bring out the logical correlations that can exist among a great number of elements belonging to a language," "to an ideology," "to a society," or to "different fields of knowledge."²⁷

Foucault sets himself the task of identifying "logical relations where none had previously been thought to exist or where previously one had searched for causal relations," a form of analysis that became for Foucault a "method of analysing the multifaceted yet invisible determinations within the social structure."²⁸

In "Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History," Foucault takes this approach and applies it to history and to the body itself, asserting that the body does not obey the 'exclusive laws of

²⁵ Mark Poster, *Foucault, Marxism, and History*, 39-40.

²⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1972), 162.

²⁷ Foucault quoted in Mark Olssen, "Foucault and Marxism: rewriting the theory of historical materialism," in *Policy Futures in Education* Vol. 2 (2004), 459.

²⁸ Mark Olssen, "Foucault and Marxism," 459.

physiology' nor does it 'escape the influence of history'. Rather, the body is "molded by a great many distinct regimes; it is broken down by rhythms of work, rest and holidays; it is poisoned by food or values, through eating habits or moral laws; it constructs resistances."²⁹ Foucault's genealogy, like most recent and/or poststructuralist accounts of genealogy, are antagonistic to the traditional assumptions of phenomenology and to dialectical accounts. In "Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History," Foucault employs — and builds on — Nietzschean genealogy: where Nietzsche confronts the Platonic essences and Forms, Foucault can be seen interrogating the anthropology of Marx and the phenomenological return to materiality itself (e.g. Husserl's 'return to things themselves'³⁰), proclaiming that "only a metaphysician would seek its [history's] soul in the distant ideality of origin."³¹

His genealogical approach, on the other hand, will "never confuse itself with a quest for their 'origins'", but will, to the contrary, "cultivate the details and accidents that accompany every beginning;" being 'scrupulously attentive', it will "await their emergence, once unmasked, as the face of the other."³² Foucault employs his genealogy in order to subvert theological, teleological, and linear conceptions of history. History is needed, he tells us, to 'dispel the chimeras of origin' and a genealogical history seeks to demonstrate history's "jolts", "its surprises", and "its lapses" which show history as "the concrete body of becoming."³³

Foucault distinguishes between traditional history with its purportedly objective nature and what he identifies as 'effective history'. Looking at Foucault's critique of traditional, academic history with its imposition of meaning and Merleau-Ponty's rejection of teleological

²⁹ Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History," in *Michel Foucault: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology* (The Essential Works, volume 2), ed. James Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1998), 380.

³⁰ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, ed. Dermot Moran, 2nd ed. 2 vols. (London: Routledge, 2001).

³¹ Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History," 373.

³² Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History," 373.

³³ Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History," 373.

histories and idealized origins, we can see the ways in which both thinkers posit a perspectival and contingent history that has great importance for notions of embodiment and the role of the body as the site of history. Their positions grow further apart with Foucault's conception of effective history but, I believe, when taken alongside Merleau-Ponty's conceptions of historical meaning, can provide a mutually reinforcing and thicker discussion of the relationship between historical regimes and power/knowledge and their reliance on and influence over the body.

Foucault's genealogy sees history as relations of power in its many forms. As such, as Thomas Flynn asserts, history as a project becomes the translation of "meaning and communication toward a 'microphysics of power.'"³⁴ Genealogical history does not chart the destiny of people or an evolution of a species, but follows histories complexities and identifies "the accidents, the minute deviations," the reversals and errors, that "gave birth to those things which continue to exist and have value for us," demonstrating that truth lies in the 'exteriority of accidents'.³⁵ It does not follow, however, Foucault asserts, that the rejection of an essentially or inherently meaningful history — a history of accidental contingency — makes history incomprehensible.

Effective history reveals a body that is "the surface of the inscription of events," one that is "totally imprinted by history."³⁶ What Foucault is arguing here is that the body is ultimately historical. While the body is certainly a physiological system, it must be interrogated in terms of its behaviors and habits, and that bodily behaviors cannot be reduced to byproducts of a physiological system. Unlike Merleau-Ponty, however, Foucault is particularly concerned with the acquisition of behaviors and habits and the politics associated with such acquisitions. What

³⁴ Thomas Flynn, "Foucault's Mapping of History," in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, edited by Gary Gutting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 35.

³⁵ Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History," 374.

³⁶ Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History," 375-6.

Foucault is suggesting, with regards to the political acquisition, is that the “behaving body is not the subject of historical forms of conduct but is rather subject to such forms of conduct.”³⁷

Foucault concerned himself with the ways in which cultural formations formed, the processes behind such formations, and how such formations became unified as truths and attained the identifier of ‘rational’. In producing genealogical accounts of discursivity and historical events, Foucault sought the implications of such practices on the thinking of a place and time. Effective history is a ‘profusion of entangled events’ for Foucault, which cannot be reduced to any essence or final value or meaning; it sets its sights on those things nearest to it — “the body, the nervous system, nutrition, digestion, and energies.”³⁸ Foucault seeks to address the polymorphous means of domination so as to demonstrate the play of dependencies in social formations and historical processes. He is specifically concerned with the body and the ways in which it is overlooked or worked around in the discourses surrounding notions of power as sovereignty and legal right.³⁹

Agency and the Spacing of Power

Where Merleau-Ponty has a thicker account of embodiment and bodily comportment, he leaves much to be desired when it comes to the relationship between the body, power, and agency. He is (in)famous for his lack of work in this area and often criticized for it; his personal politics being called into question as he writes many works commenting on Marxism, communism, fascism, and other contemporary political undertakings, but never power and agency directly and in depth. Where there is commentary (he does discuss conditions of oppression and control in *The Phenomenology of Perception*, *Sense and Non-Sense*, and more so on agency in *Humanism and Terror*) it discusses generally the political significance of ideologies

³⁷ Nick Crossley, “Body-Subject/Body-Power,” 102.

³⁸ Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History,” 381.

³⁹ As one example, see Foucault’s discussion of sovereign power contrasted with disciplinary power in *Society Must Be Defended* (New York: Picador, 2003), particularly Chapter Two.

as shifting centers of power. While rejecting the economic reductionism of orthodox Marxism, Merleau-Ponty does suggest that economy is a privileged indicator of social orientation and has thus been critiqued alongside other 20th century Marxists as being insensitive to the power of cultural forces. It is for this reason that critics of Merleau-Ponty highlight his discussions of class and labor relations as exclusionary, and turn to the post-Marxists for more adequate and coherent explanations of modern power.

For my purposes here, it is particularly in the work of Foucault that we find a detailed explication of the relationship between power and agency. What concerns Foucault, and what concerns me here, is the material processes that subjugate bodies and regulate gestures, responses, and forms of behavior as they concern violence and the war dead. In interrogating the ways in which bodies are constituted as subjects through what Foucault calls power-effects, in determining the ‘material agency of subjugation’, we are tasked with “discovering how multiple bodies, forces, energies, matters, desires, thoughts, and so on are gradually, progressively, actually and materially constituted as subjects.”⁴⁰ Importantly, never localized here or there nor the domination of one group over another, power circulates as something that functions ‘only when it is part of a chain’: power functions. “Power is exercise through networks, and individuals do not simply circulate in those networks; they are in a position to both submit to and exercise this power.”⁴¹ Individuals are never the target of power, but are instead its relays.

When taken together, Merleau-Ponty and Foucault grant us a way through the active/passive, lived body/inscribed body dichotomy. Both thinkers acknowledge the many disparate and important ways that bodies are active and the various habits and disciplines that serve to act upon bodies. When taken together, these thinkers allow us to see more coherently the

⁴⁰ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 28.

⁴¹ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 29.

ways in which these two forces come together to form subjects and the ways in which “active bodies are acted upon.”⁴² While Merleau-Ponty leans towards the active and Foucault emphasizes the acted-upon, bodies for both are situated in and have a direct relationship to space and the role space plays in embodiment. The active body, for Merleau-Ponty, with its habits and employments creates a functional space around it. The body positions the world around itself so as to make use of it, the body positioned in relation to the world so as to engage with it in a manner similar to a Heideggerian *for-the-sake-of-which* or *in-order-to*. Space is not found in the subject nor does space exist outside the subject: the active body finds itself *being-in-the-world through* space. Space, then, is not an external force acting on the body, but an entity that can only be understood in terms of the action that makes use of space. For Foucault, space is where bodies are organized and controlled. Spaces are organized and designed so as to facilitate and manage control over bodies. Seemingly directly against Merleau-Ponty, for Foucault space is not that which the body orients around itself, but is specifically that which the body is positioned within. Perhaps most importantly, the body does not render space functional, but is itself made to function by space — by the apparatus within the workshop, the layout of the prison cells or schools, the techniques of enclosure and separation of the clinic or the confessional booth.⁴³

The two can be read together in fruitful ways, however, in the sense that both conceptions require active bodies to animate space. Foucault can be read alongside Merleau-Ponty in this way because the organization of the room, the tools and machinery positioned on the assembly line, require the performance of bodies. The very ways in which the body is made useful, efficient, etc., in and by space are the same ways that the body can make space functional. Bodies are controlled by the spaces they occupy and the ways they occupy that space. That is,

⁴² Nick Crossley, “Body-Subject/Body-Power,” 105.

⁴³ See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995); *The Birth of the Clinic* (New York: Vintage, 1994); *The History of Sexuality Vol. I* (New York: Vintage, 1990).

the ways they use space in their bodily comportment and the ways in which space is used to control bodies. It is here that Nick Crossley argues that “the body can only be acted upon and co-opted, by means of space, to the extent that it acts and that it uses and co-opts space through its actions.”⁴⁴ He uses the examples of a young child or dead body — an unmastered body — as proof that non-acting bodies cannot be controlled in the same manner as acting bodies. It would not make sense, Crossley suggests, to control a child through the ‘functional differentiation of space’: “The child cannot be controlled by means of these spatial tactics because she is unable to animate and transform space in the manner required by these tactics.”⁴⁵ The suggestion is that tactics that require certain spatial animations cannot control the child or the corpse.

I read the play between Merleau-Ponty and Foucault as suggesting something different and allowing for something more. More specifically, something that allows for and incorporates the agentic abilities of corpses — of those non-active bodies that nonetheless engage the space around them and are themselves acted upon by the spaces they occupy. Ascribing the bodies of the war dead with the inability to act upon the conduct of others is to miss an important dynamic in the productive powers at play. These bodies do animate the spaces around them in important ways when it comes to conducting the conduct of others and having a meaningful impact on those who witness and interact with those bodies. The implications these bodies have for reinforcing notions of redemptive violence and categories of legitimate/illegitimate uses of violence are very real.

Overcoming the Inertia of Redemptive Violence

Much of the scholarship concerning the body discusses the body as situated within a theoretical structure and/or a social construction that works around or negates the materiality of

⁴⁴ Nick Crossley, “Body-Subject/Body-Power,” 107.

⁴⁵ Nick Crossley, “Body-Subject/Body-Power,” 107.

the body itself. Feminist and poststructuralists are amongst a group of thinkers who are critical of a phenomenological allusion to a nondiscursive or prediscursive element(s), asserting that a prediscursive origin or influence is essentially a call to the 'natural' or the 'essential', where such formations reside in social construction. The shortcoming of such uncompromising constructionism, however, is, as Diana Coole suggests, "similar to that of idealism: it surrenders an investigation of or engagement with experience to an analysis of discourse (or representation). It is therefore unable to question, learn from, or intervene in the lifeworld."⁴⁶ Those critiques focusing on the material and objectified aspects of the body by elaborating on the setting of the body within social structures are typically associated with this shortcoming.

In order for a fuller account of body politics, we must interrogate the body in social and cultural formations and in contexts of power-effects. That is, we must account for first-person narratives; the concrete, lived daily experiences individuals, as well as structural and discursive formations. It is with this strategy in mind that social and political theorists have turned to Merleau-Ponty whose interrogation of cultural 'habits' and practices doesn't reveal a biological essence, but rather demonstrates the important ways that the discursive and the habitual are two sides of the same coin (enfleshed), producing more concrete interrogations of lived and inscribed bodies. As Coole argues, "the phenomenological description of the body shows the importance of *interweaving* these methods if the chiasmic relationship between the personal and the political, or experience and structures, is to be grasped. This dual approach allows for an ongoing cross-checking as it moves towards a fuller picture of embodied intersubjectivity."⁴⁷

While there is ground being made, strongly in feminism but elsewhere as well, there has been little work done applying this interwoven approach to the war dead and interrogating the

⁴⁶ Diana Coole, *Merleau-Ponty and Modern Politics after Anti-Humanism*, 104.

⁴⁷ Diana Coole, "Experiencing Discourse: Corporeal Communicators and the Embodiment of Power," in *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* (Vol. 9, 2007), 417, emphasis original.

ways in which the corpse is both active and saturated with inscriptions of power that facilitate its operating in meaningful ways. More than simply the passive ways that we might conceive of the war dead as being imprinted in cultural memory, the corpse of the war dead plays an active role in maintaining and forming cultural norms. Further, the corpse offers a distinct mode of corporeal communication that plays a large role in redemptive politics.

The discourses surrounding, and the modes of power inscribed onto, the corpse is a way of disciplining the flesh. Just as power functions through exclusion, it also functions through inclusion – through practices of appropriation and reified meaning [the assumed military funeral/placement of national interest above personal interest] that constitute the social norms acceptable and expected at certain events. Funerals and memorials, for example, are conducted with an atmosphere of respect, condolence, and community that is instilled with more person-to-person interaction than we would normally expect or even possibly find appropriate. In many instances, if not in an intentionally formal manner, visitors who express their sense of community through explicit physical contact, where handshakes and hugs represent the deeper, more personal connection and expression of the respect that is being conveyed, more than the mundane meanings of everyday gestures, meet the family of the deceased. Military funerals in particular are marked by modes of verbal and tactile communication that identify certain bodies as belonging to a certain community and representative of certain ideals. The privileging logic particular to military funerals are reinforced through rhetoric and corporeal ceremonies: the ways in which the war dead are talked about — and remembered — through eulogies and personal stories shared overwhelmingly emphasizes their military service over other aspects of their lives; the 21 gun salute, the passing of the flag ceremony, the unique ceremonies of military tradition, represent ways of physically identifying the corpse and including it in a certain group.

Such rituals serve to keep discourses of reverence and redemption going. Military funerals illicit emotions in addition to the emotions felt at the funerals of persons not associated with war violence. In addition to sadness, perhaps melancholy, loss, nostalgia and other emotions that we can associate with funerals, we feel more specific renderings of other emotions. All funerals, one could argue, fosters a sense of community in one way or another; they are places where friends, family, coworkers, spheres of life and communities who may otherwise never overlap come together and register a common togetherness, if only around the deceased. This sense of community is hyperinflated at military funerals, where feelings of patriotism, national pride, duty and sacrifice, are commonplace. The visceral response that accompanies feelings of pride and patriotism register alongside a sense of purpose and direction – a life lived with purpose and for a meaning. The corpse of the war dead serves as a reminder of a greater project, a project larger than oneself or one’s immediate community; a project that is worth fighting – and dying – for, a project that redeems and gives validation to the corpse, not in spite of but because of the violence that project entails. The redemptive discourse tells us the strength and courage of our soldiers is demonstrated by their very willingness and ability to bear the unbearable, to go above and beyond what is expected: this is more than living in ‘austere’ conditions without the comforts of home, it is, in short, to render violence upon others. “To do what is necessary.” In this way the redemptive corpse functions.

Empowerment, Mastery, and the Gaze

Ideologies become effective through configurations of power and with these configurations come habits, uses of mastery, and agentic qualities. As Foucault asserts in “Body-Power,” “[m]astery and awareness of one’s own body can be acquired only through the effects of

an investment of power in the body...⁴⁸ Foucault discusses the relationship between forms of bodily mastery and power where mastery is the result of techniques of training: ‘gymnastics, exercises, muscle building’ are all investments of power in the body that train the body to respond to certain conditions — from social contingency to space, equipment, etc. — towards certain comportments and motilities. Not only is the body inscribed, invested and mastered, in this way, however; the body then uses this power against itself where “[p]ower, after investing itself in the body, finds itself exposed to a counter-attack in the same body.”⁴⁹ Merleau-Ponty, too, identifies bodily motility as a form of training that gives rise to usefulness and competence that goes beyond the ability to mimic or copy. Where Merleau-Ponty focuses on the empowering aspects of such training, Foucault emphasizes the political conditions of this training that allows us to render it in terms of power. Our awareness of ourselves, our embodied comportment, and our abilities as empowered agents, then, is taken up by individuals via the mechanisms of cultural formations. For both thinkers, these cultural formations are ongoing and contingent processes where such formations take their form from ever-shifting power relations, actions, and modes of corporeal communication. It is through these formations that habits and disciplined behaviors are formed, where behavior seems natural through repetition as seen, for example, in Judith Butler’s oft-cited definition of gender as “the repeated stylization of the body within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time...,”⁵⁰ where she invokes Bourdieu — Merleau-Ponty’s ‘sociological heir’ — and the concept of *habitus* and ideas of bodily habits.

One concrete example of a meaningful, habituated practice is the ways in which we gaze upon the war dead. When we see others, we recognize their material performances — their gestures and styles — upon recognition of which we assign identity (sex, race, gender, among

⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, “Body-Power,” in *Power/Knowledge* (Brighton: Harvester, 1980), 56.

⁴⁹ Michel Foucault, “Body-Power,” 56.

⁵⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 45.

others). Important to the politics of vision, to the politics of the gaze, which accompanies discursive practices is the awareness that ‘seeing’ is a reciprocal activity: those seeing — gazing — are also being gazed upon by others. The gaze is one means of internalizing power-effects: as a way of transmitting meaning with the war dead. The monuments we build and the ceremonies we conduct have meaning for us for both active and passive reasons. Like the gymnasium or the workshop, the war memorials and national cemeteries have a functional space about them, a space that dictates what actions are to be performed and in what manner. Visits to monuments are serious and solemn times of reflection, a mode of corporeal communication akin to the funeral discussed above. At the same time, on the other hand, they provide meaning in a more active way. They are empowering in that they allow us to express our support for a nation and its ideals. Military funerals, monuments, and commemorations are the functional space through which a community and sense of belonging obtain meaning through agentic expressions and actions.

Important here for my assertion of an active corpse is the relationship between those involved in the process of the gaze between the living and the war dead. More specifically, it is the intersubjectivity of the gaze, as opposed to an objective gaze, that grants the corpse agentic qualities. We can develop such a relationship through a reading of the gaze and intersubjectivity found in Foucault’s essay “The Subject and Power,” as well as his discussion of the gaze within panoptic power in *Discipline and Punish*. Accounts of the gaze and of intersubjectivity worked through by others, indeed by Foucault himself, begin with and build on two subjects capable of purposeful corporeal movement and an active gaze — in short, *they are both alive*. What I am suggesting here by accounting for the gaze of an agentic corpse is not a new or novel reading of

Foucault, but rather a way in which to let Foucault and his address of power speak to such an issue.

In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault demonstrates the normalizing powers of the gaze both for those seeing and for those being seen. In the most obvious manner, the war dead are brought under the functioning of power by the ways in which they are made visible through the practices or techniques which distinguish individuals within a particularly visible field and fosters observation (e.g. national cemetery, yellow ribbons, news reports). This field of visibility is functional through intersubjective relationships, where the watcher is being watched and the seen is at the same time seeing. Claims of an objectifying gaze where the surveyor views the surveyed as objects cannot account for the effects of self-policing and self-consciousness that is rendered as an effect of panoptic power. The anxiety the surveyed feels is secured through his or her own perception and knowing they are subjected to surveillance and a field of visibility.⁵¹ This is an intersubjective relationship because only a subject can watch and only a subject can be aware they are being watched.

Another challenge to a claim of intersubjectivity resides in the ‘invisibility’ of the power, which for the Panopticon would be the guard in the watchtower: the watchtower maintains a surveilling presence, whether occupied or not, and therein lies its power. While Foucault asserts that the prisoner is “an object of information and never a subject of communication”⁵² so as to be kept in the dark and instill the power-effects of self-policing, the tower itself, however, maintains communication with the prisoner in a material and corporeal manner; it still conveys the panoptic message of surveillance and the power-effect of self-policing. In this way, the inactive tower is

⁵¹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 202.

⁵² Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 200

granted the active, human qualities of intersubjectivity. This is not to suggest some sort of anthropomorphism but is, rather, an extension of the relational nature of power.

This relationship is strengthened by accounts of power in Foucault's essay, "The Subject and Power." In this essay Foucault explicates a sophisticated relationship between agency and power, while demonstrating the shared agency required to constitute power as such. Power in its functionality is relational, it is a "total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions... which is always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action."⁵³ Since power, Foucault tells us, does not act upon others, but is instead a set of actions upon other actions, one of the conditions for the articulation of power is that the other is "thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts." Power is a question of government; that is, the designation of the ways in which the conduct of a group or an individual might be directed. To govern, in the general, not specifically political sense, "is to structure the possible field of action of others."⁵⁴ The ways in which the war dead conduct or govern the actions of others, the ways we are mindful of their gaze in the sense of living up to their sacrifice, as one example, demonstrates a type of agency and a power-effect which serve as a means of self-policing and conscious-building on the part of its others. An intersubjectivity is occurring where "an inspecting gaze which each individual under its weight will end interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself" and where power functions continuously.⁵⁵

⁵³ Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 220.

⁵⁴ Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 221.

⁵⁵ Michel Foucault, "The Eye of Power," in *Power/Knowledge*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Vintage, 1980), 155.

For Merleau-Ponty, too, the gaze is an intersubjective activity. Encounters with others at the most basic level, are perceptual — what he calls in *Signs* ‘carnal intersubjectivity,’⁵⁶ — where each of us in our folded senses (sensed/sensing, seen/seeing, etc.) are opened onto the other. It is this opening that provides access to the other in the form of meaningful behavior. As immediately perceptual, for Merleau-Ponty, the meaningful behavior of others is immediately experienced. (This is, in part, one of the ways Merleau-Ponty pushes against Descartes, where the immediacy of meaning doesn’t allow for a reduction of the other to my thoughts about him or her, but it is also a way to demonstrate the ways in which subjects interact — which will inform the discussion here). Informing the immediacy of perception is Merleau-Ponty’s working of the gaze, which he develops from Sartre’s notion of the ‘the look’ and its alienating and ‘capturing’ effects.⁵⁷

The capturing gaze, for Merleau-Ponty, isn’t everywhere, as Sartre⁵⁸ would have it, but instead operates under specific conditions and in specific situations that allow it to function as such. The activity of human relation is both verbal and nonverbal where subjects address each other as communicative subjects. It is through such recognition as communicative agents that openness and access to the other occurs; it is not a capturing of the other, then, nor an alienation that facilitates the separation between the self and other. Rather, for Merleau-Ponty the effect of the gaze is actualized when the “mutual recognition is not realised; when we feel that we are individuated and objectified in the gaze of the other.”⁵⁹ That is, when our actions are not understood, but rather observed as an object. In such instances the look then serves to “take the

⁵⁶ Merleau-Ponty, “The Philosopher and His Shadow,” in *Signs*.

⁵⁷ For a detailed and thorough explication of the relationship between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty regarding the gaze, as well as MP’s relationship with Foucault and the gaze, see Nick Crossley, “The Politics of the Gaze: Between Foucault and Merleau-Ponty,” in *Human Studies* vol 16, no. 4 (1993): 399-419.

⁵⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992).

⁵⁹ Nick Crossley, “The Politics of the Gaze,” 415.

place of a possible communication” wherein one party constitutes themselves as “inaccessible” or in the form of an “inhuman gaze.”⁶⁰ We can see here, as with Foucault, that the refusal to communicate is still a form of communication and despite its objectifying potential it remains an intersubjective relationship.

Perception as such is an interwoven experience which functions on the folding and refolding of embodied movement, sense of self, alongside our senses of touch, taste, smell, sight, and hearing. The cultural formations of language and mood, certainly among others, coincide with and inform these phenomenological experiences and ultimately our perception of these experiences. In an illuminating demonstration, William Connolly asks us to consider a Necker cube drawn on a sheet of paper. Upon first visit — at first glance — the cube has an immediate depth and dimension to it. After a refocusing of your eye, the image now flips or inverts and the depth and dimension has shifted from left to right or vice versa. The interval between the switch of the gaze and the flip of the depth or dimension, for Connolly, speaks to the relationship between the “reception of sensory experience and cultural participation” in the perceiving process. Further, and more to my point here, “[it] teaches us that perception must be disciplined to be and draws attention to the fugitive interval during which that organization occurs. Perception depends upon projection into experience of multiple perspectives you do not now have.”⁶¹

Disciplined Perception

The discussion of modes of inscription and comportment thus far have been relatively abstract, but this is not the only manner such dialogue is fruitful and we can readily ground the abstract work at the everyday political level. It is at this level, as a concrete application, where

⁶⁰ Merleau-Ponty cited in Nick Crossley, “The Politics of the Gaze,” 415.

⁶¹ William Connolly, “Materialities of Experience,” in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency and Politics*, ed. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 185-6.

Merleau-Ponty and Foucault become most beneficial for explicating the politics of redemptive comportment. We can see a version of the disciplined perception, the changing dimensionality, in the memorials we offer in tribute to our war dead and the ways in which we discipline our gaze upon it and the ways in which it disciplines our gaze: the disciplining gaze is disciplined. In a very material way we can see this played out between the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Both monuments are located in a space set aside specifically for the commemoration of events deemed to be of national importance: the Vietnam Veterans Memorial within The National Mall and Memorial Parks run by the National Park Service, and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier located in Arlington National Cemetery. More interesting — and telling — than its physical location is the ways in which the materiality of the monuments themselves, our corporeal experiences with them, inform our perception of them.

The Tomb of the Unknowns speaks to universals, the nameless masses that have served their country. It divests all claims to ethnicity, gender, race, and religion while asserting the honor and patriotism, the service of the model citizen, with the inscription “Here rests in honored glory an American soldier known but to God” carved in the marble. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier represents a concept wherein the individual is idealized, and therefore lost. The inversion of this — another dimension and discipline — is the Vietnam Veterans Memorial where direct focus is on the individual, where the names of the over 58,000 service personnel who died or went missing in Vietnam are engraved onto the granite of the monument itself. Important to the consideration of the corporeal experience of both of these memorials is the ways in which they are spaced; that is, how the spacing of the monuments themselves and their respective operations inform our experiences of them. The ways visitors are made to utilize the space of the monuments and the ways the space utilizes visitors.

At the tomb of the Unknown Soldiers, a chain separates the visitors from the monument itself, a physical distance that solidifies the conceptual distance created by the ‘unknown’ soldier. Here the visitors, restricted from a more intimate, corporeal interaction, are taken to reflect on the ideals represented by the memorial. In addition to the physical separation of the chains, there is the presence of the ‘Tomb Guard sentinels’ and the highly orchestrated and ceremonious ‘Changing of the Guard Ritual’. The Guard maintains a presence at the Tomb twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year, through any and every condition (more recently, the Guard has been lauded for maintaining their posts during the events of September 11, 2001 and Hurricane Sandy, for example) as a demonstration of the commitment to the Tomb and what it represents. A small sacrifice for the Guards in light of the greater sacrifice of the soldier. Contrast this with the appeal to the specific, named individuals found at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the emphasis on the personal interaction of the visitors with the monument itself. The images we associate with the wall of the memorial are the ones depicting someone running their fingers over the engraved name of lost loved one, feeling and connecting with the wall itself. Often people leave personal items at the wall — a photo or dog tags — along with flowers in remembrance.

We experience the materiality of the monuments as we walk through them, observe them, and interact with them, as gendered spaces. Of the over 58,000 names etched into the wall at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, there are only eight woman listed. The legislation that President Jimmy Carter signed in July of 1980 authorized the construction of the memorial “in honor and recognition of the men and women of the Armed Forces of the United States who served in the Vietnam war.”⁶² The wall itself, however, and the names listed on it are the names of those who

⁶² Joint Resolution To authorize the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Inc., to establish a memorial, 1980. Pub. Law No. 96-297, 96th Cong. (July 1, 1980).

lost their lives or were considered missing in action, which largely (if not for the exception of but a few) is the result of serving in direct combat - roles that have only very recently been, and in a limited capacity, opened to women. The eight women whose names appear on the wall were all nurses filling non-combat positions, the only such positions they were allowed to fill. While the argument could be made that it would be easier, if only logistically speaking, to make a memorial honoring those who lost their lives than one that displayed the names of all who contributed to the war effort in every capacity, this ignores the message that the erected memorial does send. That ultimately, besides valorizing the prospect of dying for your country, the names and efforts worth commemorating are those belonging to roles restricted to men.

Eleven years after the dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in 1982, almost to the day, the Vietnam Women's Memorial was dedicated in 1993 after a decade of overcoming controversy, rejection, and stigma.⁶³ Combating the notion that the only contributions were made by males and the popularly crystallized image that only men served in the war, a small but persistent group of women sought to depict an accurate portrait of the role and contribution of women during the war — to tell their stories and to give women a 'healing place and healing process'.⁶⁴ Even with the Vietnam Women's Memorial, there is still a visual gendering of the space in the National Mall. The separation of the two monuments, the process of walking from 'the Wall' to the Women's Memorial or the shifting of the gaze from one to the other, traversing the visual in-between. The exclusion of women from America's wars and military excursions in memorials and artistic renderings is our historical legacy. This is seen, too, at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldiers who have had only three female sentinels in its history of being guarded by the military (since 1926).

⁶³ For a telling article on the process of achieving the Vietnam Women's Memorial, see Diane Carlson Evans, "Moving a Vision: The Vietnam Women's Memorial," www.vietnamwomensmemorial.org/.

⁶⁴ Diane Carlson Evans, "Moving a Vision: The Vietnam Women's Memorial," 2.

At both monuments there is a demonstration of social habits, of the civic manners that are incorporated into our bodily movements and the intercorporeal distancing between ourselves and others. There is an orchestrated movement where lines are formed, personal space is maintained, comments are kept to ‘respectful’ audible levels — these bodies know how to function in a public space and specifically at *this* public space. There is a spatialization around the monument that demarcates boundaries and which governs, monitors, and administers an authority among the relations between knowledge and power. In this way monuments function as disciplinary sites, as spaces that discipline truth and knowledge as well as the disciplining of the self by the self and by others.

The Monument Apparatus

The monument delineates a physical space from a space of appearance and (re)presentation. It is the spatial arrangement of corporeal, physical distance and the space of contemplation and reflection — an interaction between the grounds of the monument and the thoughts about what the monument (re)presents. The discourse surrounding the monument designates this space as the site of preservation, specifically the preservation of the unique and the exceptional. Further, the monument operates as the space where objects, events, and histories are collected and displayed in their purest forms. As a social discourse the materiality of the monument brings spectators into contact with the corporeal preservation of absolutes, finalities, and truths in ways that allow them to observe, but never touch the objects (re)presented (redemption, justice, righteousness, Beauty, etc.). A display that allows the spectator to approach and move towards it but never arrive.

The holding of such distance, of an arrival held in abeyance, functions as forms of resistance (as direction) on cultural memory. It functions as disciplining powers that prescribe a

discourse to the gaze which divest other communities of gaze of their legitimacy. The monument apparatus is discursively sustained, in part, by an economy of memory and the exchange between the monument and the spectator. The productive power of such an economy lies in its appropriation of the gaze and its testimony, the ways in which certain materialities are made visible and how they are made visible. This production works as constraints on memory, on social institutions, discourses, and habits that facilitates a moving forward in a specific manner and direction. The role of the monument, in the current discourse, is to demonstrate an understanding, a narrative surrounding the cultural memory of an event or history as finality, as closed. The discourse sustains memory and history as a lesson for the future — something to be understood and put to task — where the monument serves to present memory (the spectator) with a meaningful narrative that is confirmed by the spectators themselves.

In *Death's Showcase*, Ariella Azoulay asserts that the subsumption of the gaze by discourses and habits of memory divorces memory from other discourses that constitute our everyday experiences, where “memory is presented as a separate activity, isolated from mundane routine and from economic, political, and personal life, which is managed as an activity with independent patterns of looking at, solemnizing, and sanctifying the ‘exhibits’ of memory.”⁶⁵ The work of memory and its preservation is conducted within the constraints of institutional boundaries, habits, and disciplinary powers. This is the site, Azoulay suggests, where the possibility for “both the transformation of memory into an *exhibit worthy of interpretation and the constitution of the spectator as an interpreting subject* who is called on to look at the horror, confirm it, take part in the nationalist story in which it is intertwined, and become a subject of the

⁶⁵ Ariella Azoulay, *Death's Showcase: The Power of Image in Contemporary Democracy* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001), 58.

transmitted lesson” is made possible.⁶⁶ Foucault’s discourse around discipline focuses on the sites of its institutionalization — the prison, the clinic — and the ways they formulate relations between subjectivity, knowledge, and power. More specifically, the ways in which institutional interventions are predicated on prior knowledge that facilitates a new knowledge: we come out of the clinic ‘healthy’ and return from prison ‘reformed’ and suitable for ‘normal’ social living. The monument as disciplinary site is inserted into the world of discourse and intersubjectivity as a testimony understood as an object to be deciphered — to be gazed upon, interpreted, and conferred with meaning. The logic of the monument apparatus functions as a spatializing discipline, a space where spectators *visit* with the understanding that they will bear witness to a narrative, an event, or a truth. It is from these privileged historical sites that narratives and the embodied appropriations of them are taken by individuals who then maintain this discourse in its isolated position above the mundane as memory tied to war violence and redemption.

Conclusion

Understanding the power-effects surrounding the corpse of the war dead requires an interrogation with the mechanisms of a necropower in play that contextualizes and negotiates the process of assigning social identity in death. The material ways in which we experience discourses of redemptive violence maintains a finality to violence which foreclose differing potentialities by constraining and dichotomizing violence into an ‘us/them’ scenario. Foucault and Merleau-Ponty allow us to identify the politics associated with such powers and practices by facilitating an explication of our everyday lived experiences and the myriad ways such exchanges constitute the production of the both the subject and the state. The raw material for such an explication — the tombs, the monuments, the place, the display, the scars, the body, the representation — are the basis for a political organization of redemption, where the bodies of war

⁶⁶ Azoulay, *Death’s Showcase*, 58, emphasis added.

violence are politically significant for the justification of continued violence. In viewing the corpse the way we do and by incorporating it into our active world of meaning reproduces and affirms the significance and truth of redemption and its role in liberal justice.

It is through a complex array of cultural formations that we come in contact with power-effects while ourselves disciplining and morphing the boundaries of these powers and what they look like in practical experience. By utilizing the different accounts of the lived body and the inscribed body, by not collapsing the distinction between the two but maintaining a tension, the two approaches can work together to enrich the dialogue surrounding contemporary embodiment. The work of Merleau-Ponty and Foucault provide insight into the ways in which the physical remains of the war dead operate as an important influence on cultural formations, discursive practices, and ways of thinking about the world, especially with regard to violence. Situating the body as both a space of inscription and the lived experience of a political being-in-the-world, and the ways in which bodies are made to perform affirms embodied habits and truths, where politics and the body do not always occupy space in the same way. In every day conversation, the corporeal body is animated by gestures, inflections of tone, the immediacy of a face; there are many material ways the body is being expressed and ways it is being experienced by those listening. Embodied communication is mediated differently, spatialized in a way that differs from the idealized body as non-presence as it is rendered in liberal political communication. The lack of concern for or familiarity with the body and of bodies and the ways in which it is taken for granted in political — and everyday — speech is disrupted when unfamiliar bodies appear on the scene. It was my task here to look at the normative ways in which bodily interruptions of the war dead on social and political processes inform and reinforce habits of redemptive violence.

Within contemporary practices, the body maintains in death the truths and errors it has come to habituate in life. For notions of righteous violence, this means that it sustains the redemptive truth ascribed to it. Reverence and redemption are the products of cultural formations — of commitments to regimes of truth and knowledge, rationalism, and a history. Nietzsche inserts himself here as he sets us to task, as he redirects and rethinks what a critical history is and how we are to make use of it: “It is no longer a question of judging the past in the name of a truth that only we can possess in the present, but of risking the destruction of the subject who seeks knowledge, in the endless deployment of the will to knowledge.”⁶⁷ The destruction of the genealogical subject, here the war dead, for both Foucault’s body-power and Merleau-Ponty’s genetic phenomenology, I believe, must begin with a fresh account of the corpse as becoming. The body, in all its compartments, is to be seen as emergence and becoming, as such we must avoid accounting for it in terms of a final appearance. This becoming does not stop with a physiological account of death.

Our task here is not to assign an identity to the war dead, to continue the misuse of the body as means of portraying a living righteousness, but to commit ourselves to its dissipation. We are not to find a unique point of emergence or a manner of becoming, belonging to — someone — as if that were a thing, but rather seek to make visible all the eruptions, disruptions, discontinuities, and interstices that are at play. Through the explication of habits and disciplined behaviors that are the effects of power, we can begin to subvert the logic that depicts the (re)production of violence predicated on redemption as a production which serves the pursuit of justice. Such an interrogation confronts the taken-for-granted status of a politics of justice and, more concretely, the significance we confer onto the bodies of war violence so as to disrupt the

⁶⁷ Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History,” 389.

inertia of redemptive violence and reopen moments of finality and closure that surround our thinking about violence.

CHAPTER SIX: Necropolitical Redemption and the Remains of War

As for those of you here who are sons or brothers of the dead, I can see a hard struggle in front of you. Everyone always speaks well of the dead, and, even if you rise to the greatest heights of heroism, it will be a hard thing for you to get the reputation of having come near, let alone equalled, their standard. When one is alive, one is always liable to the jealousy of one's competitors, but when one is out of the way, the honor one receives is sincere and unchallenged.

- Pericles' Funeral Oration, *Thucydides*¹

Redemptive violence is largely understood as the triumph of order over chaos by means of violence. The good, here, is that which overcomes chaos. Redemptive violence has certainly played its part in world history, and American history is no exception. From the violence of the Revolutionary War to the violence in the classically American cinematic form of the Western, the brooding, solemn nature of the rugged individual who combats evil with violence continues to dominant American culture. Redemption cannot be explained away by the Christian influence in America — where the center of Christianity is the Christ figure, murdered on the cross, only to be resurrected and triumph over violence and sin — nor is it a secular lesson from history where might must be met with might and violence is the only workable (read successful) answer and response to power, coercion, and force. It is somewhere in between these two points and at the same time all of these things.

The events of September 11, 2001, served to reinforce a cultural narrative that described evil as the product of evil individuals or organizations — such acts were possible because it is their very nature. The chaos of such evil was, of course, to met by the response of an American ethos advocating an approach to violence informed, in part, by the policy of 'speak softly, but

¹ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), 150-151.

carry a big stick'. Integral to the redeeming qualities of the actions taken by the U.S. in the War on Terror was the portrayal of the U.S. as the innocent victim, only responding to “pointless and senseless acts of terrorism”² in a “struggle for civilization.”³ The result of (in some instances) a very visible demonstration of the relationship between violence and the state is a large body of work focused on the many exercises of power and/over the body. The body is, however, more than the site of scarification, the remains of a battle between power and flesh. It is also a space where truths are confirmed, affirmed, and denied. The physical remains of the dead leave for us signifiers — marks, scars, injuries, dismemberment, and distortion. What interests me here is the sort of significations that are being taken from the bodies of American war dead. What sort of truths and meanings are being taken from these bodies by the state and by the public?⁴ The war dead no longer have a voice, but their bodies speak to us.

The redemptive nature of American conceptions of violence facilitates certain modes of intersubjectivity and the ways in which we conceptualize the body in political terms. There is a discourse surrounding the use of redemptive violence that produces a world of meaning, an ordering of a political consciousness that makes a space for an effective use of redemptive violence in our social norms and practices. The bodies themselves become part of the system of signs that is left by the discourse of redemptive violence, leaving a trail for one to follow within the images it projects of itself and of the world. Projections meant simultaneously to convey a truth and command obedience. To reduce the ethos of redemptive violence to only the

² The attacks of September 11, 2001 were commonly referred to as senseless acts of violence, pointless, among other things. Similar acts of violence and terrorism are still regarded as ‘senseless’: recently, for example, President Obama called the attacks on the U.S. embassy in Libya on September 11, 2012 “senseless violence” (quoted in David Jackson, “Obama: ‘No justification’ for ‘senseless violence’,” *USAToday*, September 12, 2012).

³ President Bush quoted in “Bush: Nation in struggle to preserve civilization,” *CNN*, September 12, 2006, accessed January 27, 2014, http://www.cnn.com//2006/US/09/11/bush.memorials/index.html?section=cnn_latest.

⁴ For a telling exposition on the embodied truths of violence seen in asylum seekers in France and South African AIDS sufferers, see Didier Fassin, “The Trace: Violence, Truth, and the Politics of the Body,” In *Social Research* vol. 78 no. 2 (Summer 2011): 281-298.

justification for military campaigns, however, would be a mistake. It also speaks to the righteous quality of the American project generally and, as such, serves to nuance an American national identity.

There is something different, as one example, that happens when we hear about the torture of American soldiers or the mishandling of their corpse. Consider the reaction to the photographs of American soldiers being drug through the streets and put on display in Somalia in 1993. Or the more recent video of American Nick Berg or those we consider our allies being beheaded — the reaction of captured Christians being beheaded by members of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham). Of course there are instances of similar abuse on the American side: we burn bodies, we torture bodies,⁵ but there is something embodied — something lived — within the redemptive corpse that makes the acts substantively different. The embodied redemptive quality is a way of determining lives that matter or, rather, lives that matter in certain ways. The bodies of our enemies matter, too, of course. Consider the growing accounts detailing the desecration of combatant corpses by members of the armed forces urinating on them, or the recent reports of hundreds of rounds being fired into the already dead body of Osama bin Laden. It is my goal here to interrogate this mode of ascertaining meaning for ‘friendly’ and ‘enemy’ bodies and the institutions, norms, and practices which reproduce the use of a redemptive violence.

For most, the mention of the war veteran evokes certain images, emotions, and ideals: *bravery, sacrifice, duty, gratitude* alongside *fascist* and *murderer*. A predominant discourse surrounding war veterans is one that implies a debt incurred by those the veterans *served* — the community or the nation: “thank you for your service” is a common expression of such

⁵ Neil A. Lewis, “A Guide to the Memos on Torture,” *The New York Times*, 2005. Copies of the memos and additional resources can be found at “The Torture Database” run by the ACLU and at FindLaw.com.

indebtedness and gratitude. There has been large-scale reverence towards veterans even when the war itself is being opposed: “support the troops, not the war.”

Part of the reverence for veterans stems from the sacrifices that they make — their time, their family life, their physical and/or mental well-being, or their very lives — and the benefits that we receive (perceived, implied, or otherwise) from such acts. Such indebtedness is seen as the result of benefits received from the sacrifice of others and that this gift demands a responsibility to those who sacrificed. The word ‘benefit’ typically implies a positive notion, the addition of something or something gained. Importantly for what I am attempting to address here is the notion that we benefit from the sacrifice of others because things *didn’t* change. We are able to maintain our way of life, our conceptions of freedoms and liberties, etc. We serve and sacrifice specifically to preserve the American project and the righteous ideals on which that project stands. The righteous and redemptive nature of the soldiers’ mission is woven into the American project: their mission is righteousness.

Normalizing Violence

The discourse surrounding the war dead and the treatment of their bodies normalizes the violence inherent in all military actions. It routinizes the trauma of violent death and appropriates the bodies of war dead to legitimize the politics of redemptive violence. The rhetorical language used by the media and the American public generally is indicative of not only the inherent censorship and framing of historical events, but it also puts the ethical disposition of violence out in the open. Terms like “slaughter” and “terrorism” are expressly portrayed as something only a ‘savage’ is capable of; terrorism itself narrowly defined as an unprompted attack that exists outside the space of formal, sovereign powers and the uniformed, state sanctioned military, the ‘legitimate’ attack being the response of the state made in ‘self-defense’.

The rhetoric surrounding such accounts is readily available from government press releases and official statements. This one taken from a U.S. State Department press release: The White House Counterterrorism Report titled, “National Strategy for Combating Terrorism” and issued by the Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism outlines (literally with bullet points) the strategy and motivation of the U.S. government in their pursuit of ‘defending the Homeland, the American people, and their livelihoods.’ Opening the door wide for what is termed the ‘fight for freedom,’ the report identifies the developing mode of terrorism as a global terrorist movement and that we must “confront the radical ideology that justifies the use of violence against innocents in the name of religion,” “an ideology that justifies murder” [*sic*].⁶ So global, in fact, that the current War on Terror necessarily “extends beyond the current armed conflict that arose out of the attacks of September 11, 2001, and embraces all facets of continuing U.S. efforts to bring an end to the scourge of terrorism. Ultimately, we will win the long war to defeat the terrorists and their murderous ideology.”⁷

Neoliberal hegemony is articulated through the consensus of terms such as these, serving as a framework for understanding violence which either prevents or circumvents by functioning as a means of preempting certain types of issues and questions from being raised while itself serving as an ethical justification for a politics of redemptive violence. Moral outrage and the need for a means of public mourning have shaped the discourse surrounding violence and its uses, making violence acceptable, if not mandatory, in certain instances. In short, contemporary practices sets the task of redemption from violence by redemption through violence. It is the specific privileging of, and claim to, redemptive violence within the neoliberal tradition which

⁶ “National Strategy for Combating Terrorism (2006),” United States Department of State, accessed January 20, 2014, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/s/ct/rls/wh/71803.htm>.

⁷ “National Strategy for Combating Terrorism (2006),” United States Department of State, 3.

presents itself as a solution to violence through foreign policies shaped by notions like that of democratic peace which portray our violence as the resolution to violence.

Not necessarily only in an attempt to expose the falsity of the truths espoused by such practices, an exposition of the necropolitics in place allows us to discern the consistent manner in which it produces truths, specifically those surrounding violence and trauma. The ways in which, for example, American reverence for redemptive violence allows us to categorize the decimation of life: considering ourselves as legitimate performers of justice, we are able to explain away our own involvement in acts of terrorism and atrocity. Through current modes of representation, it has become impossible for us to hear, see, and experience our involvement in violence because, I argue, the current framework conceptualizing violence requires the nullification of competing claims: we are either, on the one hand, an authority that presents itself as a legitimate pursuer of justice acting through a redemptive violence or, on the other hand, we are inflicting violence in the same manner as *they* do. In doing this, we have minimized the meaning of loss and fostered insensitivity towards human suffering and death.

The violence in liberalism — in the sense of violence *in* the state and violence *and* the state — can be described in part by what Hannah Arendt called the “banality of evil:” the injustices that come about when ordinary people are indifferent to their participation in violence. That violence isn’t the exception or the deviation from the rule, not the actions of the “perverted or sick” but rather the actions of “terribly and terrifyingly normal”⁸ people who have the ideology of a state (and the violence therein) as part of their political consciousness and therefore saw their actions as normal.⁹ For neoliberalism, violence helps to formulate an understanding of the contemporary political environment and as such, incorporates such violence into its very

⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), Epilogue.

⁹ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 26-27.

identity and allows for the expansion of the capacity for the state to reproduce violence. There is a prevailing understanding concerning the issue of violence and its causes and consequences that has become solidified as a contemporary social response and imbedded in the mechanisms and ethos of government and nongovernment entities alike.¹⁰As the number of war dead grew on all sides, politicians, the media, and social commentators did more than simply provide descriptions or explanations for the violence, they used their discourse as means of making such violence acceptable and necessary. Weakening public sympathy for the ‘terrorists’ and civilians of other nations by explaining away the situation or justifying instances of atrocity as normal externalities of war, diluting public attention on and pressure for redress.

Moreover, the growing violence and the rising death toll on all sides was explained as a sign of the increased efforts of the U.S. military. Some civilian casualties are an anticipated result of any armed conflict; the rising number of civilian casualties in the War on Terror (or Overseas Contingency Operations¹¹) is a result of the amplified efforts to root out terrorism and the source of American insecurity at home. In other words, the growing violence was a good thing, a sign that we were getting to the root of the problem.

Utilizing the destruction of both towers of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 as a demonstration of the type of ‘terrorism’ we face and the ‘unconventional’ methods used by the enemies of the United States (because they used airplanes as a destructive force as opposed to, say, the more conventional — read legitimate — use of bombers or missiles), *we did not meet violence with violence in our response, we met violence with righteousness and redemption*. The popular response politicized the bodies of those in the towers: the dead, the

¹⁰ See Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso, 2010) and Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

¹¹ ‘Overseas contingency operations’ is a term implemented in 2009, purportedly in efforts to move away from the rhetoric and stigmas surrounding President Bush’s ‘Global War on Terror.’ See “‘Global War on Terror’ Is Given New Name” by Scott Wilson and Al Kamen In *The Washington Post*, March 25, 2009.

wounded, and the survivors became a tool to organize the political order. A demonstration of the necropolitics in place highlighting the publicness of the victims and their dead or mutilated bodies, their bodies falling from the heights of the towers as they leaped to their deaths to avoid the flames.

The Necropolitics of Redemption

Considering the work of Achille Mbembe is useful here because he points out politics as the workings of death within the social interactions linking the state production of subjects and the social production of the state. For Mbembe, and others identifying a necropolitics, the dead “provide the raw material for this politics; their bodies, their gender, their location, and their scars and mutilations are the basis for weaving tales,”¹² where the relationship between death and politics is essential for an understanding of how states and subjects emerge through the production and reproduction of death.

Mbembe, while using Foucault as a point of departure, argues that biopolitics does not provide a sufficient explanation for how death is used as a means of governance — a technique of power — in contemporary society. Biopolitics and necropolitics are wound together, however, since governments exercise techniques of power to protect some lives and justify the death of others. Mbembe utilizes Foucault’s analysis to bring attention to ways in which the meanings of death in necropolitics develop through notions of the body and through embodiment.

Necropolitics for Mbembe is, in one way, the asking of the question: “What place is given to life, death, and the human body (in particular the wounded or slain body)? How are they inscribed in the order of power?”¹³ Additionally, as Melissa Wright points out, Mbembe’s work comes in contact with that of Giorgio Agamben and his discussion of the state of exception. Mbembe “does

¹² Melissa W. Wright, “Necropolitics, Narcopolitics, and Femicide: Gendered Violence on the Mexico-U.S. Border,” In *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 36, no. 3 (2011): 726.

¹³ Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” In *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 12.

not regard the politics of death as presenting an exception but rather as the dominant social configuration in states that operate under conditions of emergency, as in marshal law imposed by civilian governments...”¹⁴

Important for the work of necropolitics is the manner in which we invest the body with properties and signification, and the distinctions that are made between bodies. In this regard, the treatment and differentiation of bodies in the modern, unconventional war on terror is precisely that: unconventional. Bodies in this context are not understood in the conventional liberal manner, meaning political entities that receive their status from an organized state. This is because the war is not being fought between states; not, that is, as a legitimate war being fought by uniformed soldiers and a regular army, guided by a legitimate state. Warring factions do not discern the combatants from the noncombatants or, importantly, between ‘enemy’ and ‘criminal’. Mbembe points out that they do not “imply the mobilization of sovereign subjects (citizens) who respect each other as enemies,”¹⁵ as if in some noble Nietzschean mode.¹⁶ For the ‘legitimate’ states fighting a war on terror, the question then becomes about the legal/judicial status of the enemy. Because they do not belong to a proper state as they recognize it, how should they register the enemy’s use of force? Are they enemy soldiers or are they criminals because of their nonconventional, hence illegitimate, use of force?

To get at this, we must first interrogate what it is we label as violence. To what do we give the name violence? What characteristics do we attribute to it? Not everyone applies the same structure of feeling towards violence as we do — viewing it as scandalous, invariably and

¹⁴ Wright, “Necropolitics, Narcopolitics, and Femicide,” 709.

¹⁵ Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” 24.

¹⁶ Nietzsche tells us the ‘noble’ and the ‘aristocrat’ “insists on having his enemy to himself as his distinction. He tolerates no other enemy but a man in whose character there is nothing to despise and much to honor!” Perversely for our discussion here of modern conceptions of the enemy as seen in the war on terror, Nietzsche also asserts that it is the ‘creativity’ of the ‘resentful man’ who has “conceived the ‘the evil enemy’ against whom he figures the “‘good one’ himself – his very self!” Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Horace B. Samuel (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 2006), First Essay §10, emphasis original.

inarguably wrong at face value (thus violence needs the qualifier ‘redemptive’ to be considered a just act). To label violence the way we do, is to already be standing outside this violence. To be gazing upon it from a distance so as to evaluate and classify it. Part of this distancing comes in the form of the modern state, the regulation of monopolized violence, and the delegitimizing of violence in non-state arenas. The delegated and regulated use of violence becomes, for the state, the legitimate application of *force*. The modern state legitimizes its own use of force while delegitimizing all others: the stronger the state, the more actions and forms of force or injury used outside official capacities become labeled as ‘violent’ and, thus, illegitimate. That is, if it is not delegated to and performed by official state functionaries. By delegating violence, as Michael Warner puts it, “we neutralize it in nonstate contexts, so that it can appear only as scandal or crime, contrasted with a normal state that is understood as pacific. Violence appears violent insofar as it can be contrasted with legitimate force; the more legitimately force comes to be delegated, the more illegitimate all undelegated force — violence — comes to seem.”¹⁷

For me, then, and for determining a necropower related to neoliberalism, the question now circles around the ways we determine killing and the ways we determine dying. In other words, what is the difference in killing by suicide vest or flying a plane into a building and killing with warplanes or tanks? Further, how does this reflect onto the ways we determine a manner of dying? The act of beheading is seen as excessively gruesome, even for war, and is seen as a war crime, an act of savagery, whereas exploding bodies with grenades or missiles, shredding them with flechette anti-personnel rounds (the militarized equivalent of a pipe bomb loaded with nails and shot out of a rocket), is somehow deemed acceptable. Moreover, we marvel at the sophistication and superiority of our military technology — the ease and distance with which we can kill.

¹⁷ Michael Warner, “What Like a Bullet can Undeceive?” In *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 45.

What concerns me is the *type of survivor* created by the ‘legitimate’ use of force. My aim here is not to try and describe a difference between the types of violence — suicide bombings or drone strikes — or assign some hierarchical scale either in moral categories or some sort of calculus of violence. Rather, I am interested in the frameworks that develop different moral responses to such violence: why is a death occurring as the result of state sponsored violence considered the ‘price of freedom’, but those that result from stateless terrorism are tragic in a different way — illegitimate or even criminal. The state must maintain the ‘criminal’ nature of its enemy if it is going to continue to facilitate the righteous and redemptive motivations and implications of their cause. It must externalize and marginalize the enemy, in part by pointing out that the terrorists see no wrongdoing in *their* form of violence. They operate outside the normalized rules of legitimate violence by attacking anyone other than uniformed soldiers or military installations.

Important to what I am discussing here are notions of life and death and how they are delineated from each other — where they overlap and where they are mutually exclusive. More specifically, as a nuance of this critique, are notions of a social life and a social death. The social life of the deceased and wounded, especially those involved with wartime violence, extends beyond their physical existence. The war dead remain socially active; they become socially alive but biologically dead.¹⁸ What are the implications of neoliberal conceptions of the social self as separated from the physical self, the corporeal body, and its continued effects after death? The bodies of the victims of war violence serve, at the symbolic level, as a representative of a social system and its political, ideological, and cultural beliefs. How a society and a governing system

¹⁸ See Elizabeth Hallam, Jenny Hockey, and Glennys Howarth, *Beyond the Body: Death and Social Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 2-3.

treats the corpses of the war dead is a product of its exercise of sovereignty, the ways in which it defines who must live and who must die, and the manner of each.

We are familiar with war as an extension of politics, and politics as an extension of war, but what is to come, politically, of these bodies? What space is afforded to the human body — the wounded or lifeless body — in the context of neoliberal, redemptive notions of sovereignty, of life, and of death? Physically speaking the dead are, in a certain way, the combination of organic and inorganic compounds that, if left, would decompose into the soil on which it lies, leaving little remnants of its physical presence. Beyond the physical, however, beyond simple corporeal attributes, the bodies of military and civilian war casualties hold specific meaning.

The Remains of War

To fully understand how American redemptive violence works, we need to understand it from the point of view of those who could be considered its victims as well how it is actualized through perpetuating individuals: how it enters into their formation as acting and deliberating subjects. What is allowed to appear in the public sphere is one way to account for reality; as such, it is imperative for the sustainability of redemptive violence that such reality is regulated so as to control not only the content of what people see and hear, but the ways in which people see and hear.¹⁹

The threshold for an acceptable response to trauma and violence delineates the domain in which viable actors can operate. So what does this space, a reasonable opinion within the public domain, consist of and what is the shape of a response that facilitates a viable subject? Neoliberal conceptions and practices that can be described by Foucault's description of *biopower* and the

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* (New York: Picador, 2003), especially 215-38. See also Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

development of *governmentality*: the ‘art of government’ as a mode of power that concerns itself with maintaining and controlling bodies and persons, control over the production and order of persons and populations, and with the production and reproduction of subjects.²⁰ Particularly the exercise of neoliberal conceptions of sovereignty through the handling of bodies and the ways in which it assigns identity in death for casualties of war violence. By focusing on the neoliberal employment of righteous and redemptive violence and the workings of notions of sovereignty and governmentality as it develops a neoliberal necropolitics, we can begin to explore the possibilities of disrupting such violence. Through such a critique, we can shed light on the various tensions inherent in the ways we exercise violence, the ways in which we respond to violence both physically and rhetorically, and how such processes lead to the production of an ethical response-ability. Beyond the mourning and placement of significance typically associated with loss through death, specific meaning is given to the bodies of the war dead in both their physical and social lives. When examining the production of such meaning and its relation to the violence itself, it is important to explore the significance and treatment we give the bodies of the war dead and the acts of sovereign exercise it reproduces. Important for my position here is the deployment of a social identity of the body and the ways in which we deal with the tensions between the assumed nationalist attachments of war dead, state interest in its war dead, and those of personhood.²¹

An integral part of this lasting meaning is determined by acts of mourning, methods of coping, and the ways in which we signify and commemorate those killed by war violence. The

²⁰ See Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 87-104

²¹ For a detailed examination of the ways in which state interests compete with the personhood interest of the deceased, see Mary L. Clark, “Keep Your Hands Off My (Dead) Body: A Critique of the Ways in Which the State Disrupts the Personhood Interests of the Deceased and His or Her Kin in Disposing of the Dead and Assigning Identity in Death,” In *Rutgers Law Review* 58:1 (2005).

treatment of the dead and wounded, those recovered and unrecovered, is a way of satisfying a need to mourn. Both of these processes rely in large respect on the physical recovery of the body or of some possession belonging to the person. The bodies of war dead and their recovery are determined by current situations and the physical ability of those wishing to recover the body, as well as the physical condition of the body itself. There is no shortage of accounts of soldiers and civilians alike living amongst the dead when they are not afforded the opportunity to recover the body or properly take care of the dead. There is also a long history of attempts made at formalized mourning on or near the battlefield or in the rubble of their former homes, of tending to the burial of the body in what ever manner is available, however hastily. Such makeshift funerals demonstrate the immense importance of burial rituals and methods of conferring significance for the living. A Michael Sledge suggests, the funeral, “however simple, helps to dispel the wanton randomness of death in battle, and the performance of even simple rites helps the soldiers [or civilians] make contact with a reality they have left behind and hope to regain.”²²

In looking at the ways in which we handle our war dead we can begin to understand the exercise of a sovereign power and the reproduction of that power through state interest in how and where the dead are buried. The state has a vested interest in encouraging and rewarding loyalty and self-sacrifice (amongst other attributes) in efforts to shape and maintain norms and practices. The endorsement and reinforcement of nationalist interests has an important role to play in conceptions of governmentality and has become increasingly prevalent for the ways in which individuals identify themselves in and understand the world. Benedict Anderson offers such an argument in his *Imagined Communities*, where nationalism has come to challenge the dominance of religion in supplying modes of understanding ourselves and our place in the world.

²² Michael Sledge, *Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury, and Honor Our Military Fallen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 17.

Not that religious communities were outgrown or replaced wholesale by conceptions of national communities, Anderson tells us, but “[b]eneath the decline of sacred communities, languages and lineages, a fundamental change was taking place in modes of apprehending the world, which, more than anything else, made it possible to ‘think’ the nation.”²³ Important to this new way of understanding the world was a carrying over of the questions concerning life and death, our place in the greater order of things, ‘man as a species being, and the contingency of life.’ What was needed was the “secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning” and “[a]s we shall see, few things were (are) better suited to this end than an idea of nation” where it is the “magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny.”²⁴

We have a long tradition in the United States of displaying our patriotism with the display of yellow ribbons, for example, amongst other avenues of displaying support for the military and American ‘overseas contingency operations’. An example of a more intimate recognition of military death and its assumed relation to nationalism and state interest is direct recognition by the state of the mothers (specifically ‘natural mothers’ in the following example) of war dead. Gold Star Mothers is a group operating under a federal charter and was founded shortly after WWI. Working under the pretenses of a nonpolitical organization, the significance of the gold star is stated to represent the “honor and glory accorded the person for his supreme sacrifice in offering for his country, the last full measure of devotion and pride of the family in this sacrifice, rather than the sense of personal loss which would be represented by the mourning symbols.”²⁵ Note here the focus on nationalism, on patriotism and the sense of pride that comes with following state interest, as specifically operating above and beyond any sense of personal or

²³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006), 22.

²⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 10-12.

²⁵ “History,” American Gold Star Mothers, accessed January 17, 2014, <http://www.goldstarmoms.com/WhoWeAre/History/History.htm>.

familial loss. The congressional charter that incorporated the organization lists the purposes for which the corporation is organized; naming, among others, to: “perpetuate the memory of those whose lives were sacrificed in our wars;” “maintain true allegiance to the United States of America;” “inculcate lessons of patriotism and love of country;” “inspire respect for the Stars and Stripes in the youth of America;” and “inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, State, and Nation.”²⁶

Similar to our national cemeteries, as we will see, the Gold Star Mothers has a history of discrimination based on race and citizenship. G. Kurt Piehler writes in his *Remembering War the American Way* that initial pilgrimages to Europe made by gold star mothers to visit the burial sites of their child(ren) were restricted to members only, which at the time meant white women. The African American pilgrims were segregated from the white pilgrims, white women traveling on luxury liners and African American women on commercial steamers.²⁷ More recently, in 2005 the organization refused to grant membership to a non-U.S. citizen. Though congressional attention was sought to intervene, the organization worked internally to ultimately amend its constitution to admit non-citizen mothers.²⁸ Practices such as these demonstrate the entangled relationship between military and state norms and their downstream social practices.

So just what are these nationalist claims and state interests that deal with the war dead and how do they produce social practices and exercises of sovereignty? The ways in which we handle our dead is a unique way on conferring significance on certain populations. The ceremony and privileged locations with which we bury our war dead are indicative to the

²⁶ The Gold Star Mother’s charter is listed under Title 36 of the United States Code, which outlines the role of Patriotic Societies and Observances. List of purposes taken from Gold Star Mother’s website (supra note 18).

²⁷ G. Kurt Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way* (Smithsonian Books, 2004) cited in “World War I Gold Star Mothers Pilgrimages, Part I” by Constance Potter in *Prologue Magazine*, Summer 1999, Vol. 31, No. 2.

²⁸ Kevin R. Kosar, “Congressional or Federal Charters: Overview and Enduring Issues,” In *Congressional Research Service Report for Congress*, April 19, 2013.

importance we place on their physical remains as well as their social significance. National cemeteries, where we bury our military dead, have long been used in the U.S. to promote certain conceptions of nationalism, meanings and understandings about the nation, and certain positions regarding duties as a citizen. This can be seen from the very beginning with the first national cemeteries following the Civil War (1862), where social norms were reinforced: the separation of Union and Confederate graves as well as the separation of black and white soldiers.

The location of burial sites and national cemeteries made similar political statements with the burial of Union troops, and the memorials and monuments that went along with the graves, often taking place in Southern ground. Arlington National Cemetery, the nations largest and most prestigious national cemetery, for example, was located on the family estate of Robert E. Lee, “not as a matter of convenience or happenstance in death, but, rather, an intentional assertion of the nation’s interest in honoring the dead, specifically focused on the property of the Confederacy’s commander.”²⁹ Though there were many Confederate soldiers buried in Arlington, it was considered a Union cemetery and the families of Confederate soldiers were not allowed to decorate or adorn with flowers the graves of their loved ones, and some, in extreme instances, were denied access to the cemetery and the graves altogether.³⁰ This practice can be seen more recently and on the global stage with the placement of national cemeteries abroad, most prominently in Europe after WWI and WWII, but collectively in ten different countries around the world, interring a total of 124,905 U.S. war dead in twenty-four permanent American burial grounds.³¹

²⁹ Clark, “Keep Your Hands Off My (Dead) Body,” 54-55.

³⁰ “Confederate Memorial,” Arlington National Cemetery, accessed August 21, 2015, <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/visitorinformation/MonumentMemorials/Confederate.aspx>.

³¹ “Cemeteries,” American Battle Monument Commission, accessed August 21, 2015, <http://www.abmc.gov/cemeteries/index.php>.

The placement of our dead and the location of their internment are telling of the way we think about the relationship between memory and place, and the way we organize violence into collective memory and social consciousness. In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin discusses the role of architecture, of shelters and structures, the ways in which buildings are appropriated, and importantly, a discussion of the work of art with regard to concentration and distraction. In contrast with the absorption into the work of art by the concentrating individual, “the distracted mass,” he tells us, “*absorb* the work of art. This is most obvious with regard to buildings. Architecture has always represented the prototype of a work of art and the reception of which is consummated by a collectivity in a state of distraction.”³²

The distractive aspects of the buildings and monuments that comprise our everyday surroundings, our everyday experience, facilitates a forgetting and does so without requiring active participation; it is a different kind of working through or mourning. The recently finished One World Trade Center skyscraper in Manhattan is an example of how monuments to our dead, the architectural configuration of space, can work as a commemoration of the past that simultaneously moves past it. While rising to a symbolic 1,776 feet above ground level, the One World Trade Center building sits on a completely restructured World Trade Center complex. The remnants of the old buildings, the site of trauma, having been completely removed, we could move forward with a clean slate and a fresh start. Integral to the design of the new complex and its main tower was the focus on the future, built in a modern architectural style that differs drastically from the uniform and symmetric twin towers of the past. It attempts to offer a vision of things to come, rather than a focus on the memories of a traumatic past. A space of violence and trauma that has been refigured.

³² Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” In *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1968), 239, emphasis added.

More recently, similar grassroots efforts have gained momentum among both military families and civilian supporters. Groups like the Red Shirt Friday organization whose mission statement specifically announces and endorses their apolitical nature: “We are not a political organization. We do not care whether or not one supports or does not support our nation’s specific military missions;” instead, making their support of servicemen and servicewoman known to ‘fellow Americans and the world’, wishing to let them know that they “support their sacrifice and that we will not forget them; we will do this by wearing red every Friday.”³³ Such ‘apolitical’ discourse of ‘support the troops, not the war,’ is implicated in an economy of reverence that ultimately condones notions of righteous and redemptive violence, achieved through the functioning of a necropolitics and created by the trace of redemptive violence on American war dead.

The Mnemonic Branding of Necropolitical Redemption

The confrontation between discourse and actions, the relationship of the institutions surrounding a redemptive discourse and the subjects that interact with it, is very intimate in nature and is articulated through many rituals and practices. It is not to be seen simply as an overt coercion or use of force, but an internalized technique that operates in and is (re)produced through daily life where the explicit and the implicit are interwoven in the social fabric. A daily life that is figured not only by active humans but by a world of material *things* that contextualize our interactions and which serve both as interruptions and as backdrops. What can we learn — and in what ways — from the background of material things that we interact with constantly? In what ways do they, too, function below the dynamic, productive powers of material formations?

Recent treatments of the relationship between capitalism and neoliberal modes of government and the economy have focused in part on considerations of branding or a ‘brand

³³ Mission statement of the Red Shirt Fridays organizations, as of January 17, 2014, <http://redshirtfridays.org/>.

culture'. Critics explicate a brand culture, coining terms such as "affect economy," "caring economy," and "digital economy," in attempts to grasp the mechanisms of modern consumerism acted out by the individual. For Luciana Parisi and Steve Goodman, branding functions as the preemption of memory that is required by neoliberal modes and operates under what they call "cybernetic capitalism."³⁴ Behind the immediate perception of a brand or label exists a virtual world of affect, for which the tangible imagery of the logo only serves as an access card. The market no longer needs to tell the consumer what they want in the traditional ways, the consumer themselves are 'empowered' through choice. Here, choice means everyone designs his or her own products through custom options, tailored to fit your personality and individual mode of expression (my iPod is a blue Nano, because it fits — and advertises — my active lifestyle, etc.). The creativity of the consumer has become capital in what is called 'life-style branding', where individual autonomy is expressed through market mechanisms.

Parisi and Goodman offer a critique of branding as form of what they term mnemonic control. Noting the operation of aesthetic power through affective networks as well as through cognition, we can see the workings of lifestyle branding through affective capitalism — that "parasite on the feelings, movements, and becomings of bodies, tapping into their virtuality by investing preemptively in futurity."³⁵ When we come into contact with labels, logos, and brands that 'seduce' us, possess us, we "flip into autopilot, are abducted from the present, are carried off by an array of prehensions outside chronological time into a past not lived, a future not sensed."³⁶ Looking at preemptive modes of power that foreclose future potentialities, Parisi and

³⁴ Luciana Parisi and Steve Goodman, "Mnemonic Control," in *Beyond Biopolitics: Essays on the Governance of Life and Death*, ed. Patricia Ticineto Clough and Craig Willse (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 163-176. Here, 'cybernetics' refers to the "the study of systemic self-governance, the way systems, biological, physical, mechanical, economic, religious, political, etc., regulate themselves through feedback relationships" (168).

³⁵ Parisi and Goodman, "Mnemonic Control," 164.

³⁶ Parisi and Goodman, "Mnemonic Control," 164.

Goodman look at power as a dimension of cultural memory which they suggest exercise modes of control which point to the ‘virtual governance of the unlived;’ more specifically, unlife “tags the relational (dis)continuum ontologically prior to the separation of the living from the nonliving, and therefore engages with the reality of unlife, the virtual entities and their active agency within actual, living processes.”³⁷ That is, of future decision making potentials and the conditions for those decisions.

There is an interesting parallel between the work of Parisi and Goodman (and others who do work on branding cultures) and ways in which necropolitical redemption functions as a mnemonic brand. That is, the ways in which the productive power of necropolitics functions as a preemptive investment in futurity. We are familiar with the postmodern critique of capitalism, where consumption governs and the operation of the simulacra functions to recuperate all deviations back into itself.³⁸ The role of entrepreneurialism and individualism, which are seen as market mechanisms that allow for invention and creation outside the norm, ultimately operate as a sign value in the world of the simulacra — the critique being that all value is sign value as such and therefore cannot exist outside of itself. Alongside the aporias and problematics of the postmodern critique, however, and through the structure of necropolitics we can see the very real ways that such branding functions and does in fact produce. We can buttress this critique with, or rather see it alongside, the notion of biopolitics as the statistical and probabilistic techniques of power aimed at the subjugation of bodies. Where subjects fall under what Foucault calls ‘governmentality’ and become the political object of management and where there is “first a seizure of power over the body in an individualizing mode,” after which comes a “second seizure of power that is not individualizing, but, if you like, massifying, that is directed not at man-as-

³⁷ Parisi and Goodman, “Mnemonic Control,” 166.

³⁸ See, as one example, Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1994).

body but at man-as-species.”³⁹ Biopolitical power is a positive power, a producing power, which goes beyond repressive measures of control and employs preemptive control measures.

In this way we can begin to consider redemptive necropolitics as a brand, a lifestyle brand, which informs one of the many characteristics Americans (certainly among others) identify as and with. Such branding organizes itself towards a future that is defined by its preemptive potentialities and the ways in which the necropolitics in play familiarizes us with the unknown: the memory of a past we ourselves did not have and the connection to a future we have not yet lived. The work of branding is to activate the memory in a way that amalgamates the past, present, and future. It appeals in a more immediate sense to the way you are now, but it also calls into play the way you have always viewed yourself and the ways you will want to view yourself — and be viewed by others — in the future. The appeal of the vibrant blue Ipod Nano appeals to me in the present because of my active lifestyle, but it also speaks to the way I saw myself in the past (or at least how I imagined myself to be) but was not able to express in so personalized a manner (we all had the same, grey CD player, maybe). Importantly, branding shapes our future memories in its production of a preemptive power; in the ways it produces future memories. Preemptive power, in contrast to a repressive power, functions by fulfillment (production) instead of mere restriction. In this way, memories are achieved and affect awoken by corporeal situations that you have not experienced, but exist in the virtual, in the imaginary: “In short-term intuition the future yet to be formed is actively populating the sensations of the present, anticipating what is to come, the feeling of what happens before its actualization.”⁴⁰

Mnemonic control concerns power over futurity by the ways in which it forecloses the indeterminacy or uncertainty of the future by actualizing it in the present, where memories are

³⁹ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 243.

⁴⁰ Parisi and Goodman, “Mnemonic Control,” 167.

constructed by *unlived* experiences and where the unknown is made familiar. Here, feelings are produced before the actualization of an event, before the phenomenological experience could be said to have happened. The construction and maintenance of affective memories is tied to an appeal to the affective body and the way the body responds emotionally to its surroundings. Importantly, the work of affective memory here is beneficial for preemptive power in that it functions through an anticipation of the future rather than merely drawing on experiences from the past. It asserts an active memory in contrast to passive recollection. The active component of this memory work functions to entangle the past, present, and future where the past does not simply follow along chronologically behind the present but exists alongside it. Not only our past, but our future is immersed in our present. It is the present where we are familiarized with an unknown futurity, where the unknown becomes anticipated through active production and where we become aware — again through production — of the immanence of the future in the present. In this way, we can see the connection between a history of the present and what we might call the future of the present. Put another way, the past and the future are both actualized in the present.

Just as modern branding seeks to distribute the desired virtual response/affect to a product or service (joy, status, or whatever) which gives the consumer a sense that the product or service has already been experienced in advance of an actual, corporeal experience, the necropolitical branding of redemption functions as a virtual enjoyment or perception of the self as actually experiencing that fulfillment in terms of righteousness, among other ideals. It is in this occupation of the present by the future that preemptive power functions. It is the immediacy of the logo, the brand, the image. What is needed, then, is an interrogation with this virtual memory and ways in which necropolitical preemptive power sits at the interstice of the past and

future in the present. The ways in which redemption is achieved *before* the moment of violence: how the preemptive power of necropolitical redemption assured the redemptive affect and redeeming qualities of *any* action taken because it was decided in advance — that is, in the present.

Robert Heath, a researcher in marketing and advertising theory, challenges recall-based metrics and the underlying belief that advertising — or branding — has to be persuasive where, almost definitively, persuasion requires the acute attention of the person or population you are trying to reason with or otherwise convince. We are all familiar with such advertising techniques and the ways in which companies, firms, or individuals try to ‘get their image out there’ and ‘be seen’ and where ‘any publicity is good publicity’ because it is exposure that is the primary requirement for effective advertising. Heath questions this assumption and instead raises questions about whether or not the advertising itself needs to be remembered for the message to be retained. In pursuing this, Heath interrogates the advertising processes at low levels of attention and the role that affect plays in modern advertising.

In a paper with Agnes Nairn, “Measuring Affective Advertising: Implications of Low Attention Processing on Recall,”⁴¹ Heath and Nairn note the importance of implicit memory, as opposed to explicit, recall memory, in low involvement advertising. Most relevant to our conversation here is the way implicit memory works *conceptually* and stores simple meanings from what we perceive experientially; that is, it can store affective values produced in response to perceptual experiences. Implicit memory has been found to perform (here in the marketing sense of relating to influence over purchases) better than explicit memory in three regards:

⁴¹ Robert Heath and Agnes Nairn, “Measuring Affective Advertising: Implications of Low Attention Processing on Recall,” in *Journal of Advertising Research* (June 2005): 269-281. For a additional resources concerning Heath’s work in the area of low-involvement marketing, see Robert Heath, *The Hidden Power of Advertising: How Low Involvement Processing Influences the Way We Choose Brands* (Oxfordshire: Admap Publications, 2001).

durability, capaciousness, and most importantly implicit memory is found to be *independent of attention*.⁴² Utilizing recent work in neuroscience, Heath and Nairn note that implicit memory “appears to be a substantial memory system that can record perceptions and concepts *automatically and irrespective of how much attention is being paid*, and can retain them over long periods.”⁴³ In contrast to the direct ‘grab-your-attention’ marketing techniques that traditionally associate branding success with the ability to recall a brand name or motto, Antonio Damasio has similarly found “that feelings and emotions are processed *without* the use of working memory and so *by definition* must be processed automatically and implicitly.”⁴⁴ Recognition and its ties to implicit learning have been found to be “effectively inexhaustible” and serve to supplement Heath and Nairn’s finding that “brand association and their emotive links endure in memory beyond the point at which conscious recollection of the advertisement itself disappears.”⁴⁵

The parallels between implicit learning and advertising and the way our version of necropolitics brands redemption can now be exposed. The example of the new One World Trade Center skyscraper with its wiping the slate clean and its orientation towards the future is comparable to a life-style branding, the pulling of the future into the present. The shaping of the future through preemptive decisions made today: “this is how I will look and what I will represent in the future (to the exclusion of other options).” Buildings and monuments that are tied to the war dead are not only active when they become interruptions into our daily lives — when we hear of a funeral at Arlington or when they finish a building honoring veterans. The ways that such monuments blend into our surroundings and become the background to our daily

⁴² See Heath and Nairn, “Measuring Affective Advertising,” 273.

⁴³ Heath and Nairn, “Measuring Affective Advertising,” 273-4, emphasis added.

⁴⁴ Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*, cited in Heath and Nairn, “Measuring Affective Advertising,” 274, emphasis original.

⁴⁵ Heath and Nairn, “Measuring Affective Advertising,” 274, 278-9.

lives does not mean that they do not have an affective impact on our decision-making and the ways we view ourselves and each other. When conscious recollection of the brand disappears, when the swelling tide of patriotism fades in the weeks or months following the incursion of an event into our active memory, the affect and association to notions of redemptive violence remains.

The mnemonic branding of necropolitical redemption functions as a preemption that shapes the future by occupying the present with disciplining forces, producing future potentialities for redemption. Such disciplined perception has led to directly to preemptive wars, where, following the chaos of an attack in New York City, any action *we could take* was seen as righteous. Where righteousness and redemption will be *maintained* in the future by action in the present (so our brand association tells us). It is clear that the implicit memory and association operating in the virtual or imaginary — the future in the present — does not mean that actions and events do not have real meaning for the lived experience.

Conclusion

If we entertain the marketing analogy, a politics of redemption is no longer produced and advertised for us in the traditional (i.e. neon lights and obtrusive sales tactics) sense — at least not entirely. Redemptive social/political formations constitute the background of our everyday experiences and are introduced or maintained to us through our affective bodies and the ways in which we absorb the perceptual world around us. Such implicit learning serves to reinforce the overt forms of righteousness imbued in modern liberalism and functions as a way of normalizing violence and determining which bodies matter and in what ways. The consistent manner in which a necropolitics of redemption produces truths, specifically those surrounding violence and

trauma, and its role in normalizing the way violence is performed in the current political organization, employs a productive power that functions as a preemptive investment in futurity.

The body is a space where truths become realities and where concepts become lived experiences. The permanency of a corporeal death demands a final word of sorts – an everlasting image that will remain, if only in posterity, of ourselves and the way we see ourselves. An image of ourselves today set in a futurity yet unrealized. The war dead and the victims of war violence, and the ways we confer significance on their very corpses, serve a unique function in this regard. Their voiceless bodies speak through a discourse of redemptive violence that produces a world of meaning and an ordering of the political organization that forges a space for an effective use of violence in our social norms and practices. A violence that places the scared, injured, and dismembered bodies of some over the scared, injured, and dismembered bodies of others in the political order through a preemptive mode of predetermined justice.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Self-fashioning and Aesthetic Violence

“When Nietzsche, and later Foucault, commend the self as a work of art acting modestly and artfully upon its own entrenched contingencies, the aim is not self-narcissism, as neo-Kantians love to insist. *The point is to ward off the violence of transcendental narcissism*: to modify sensibilities of the self through delicate techniques, to do so to reach ‘beyond good and evil,’ so that you no longer require the constitution of difference as evil to protect a precarious faith in an intrinsic identity or order. The goal is to modify an already contingent self...so that you are better able to ward off the demand to confirm transcendently what you are contingently.”

— William Connolly, “Beyond Good and Evil”¹

We can recall that for Foucault government is generally conceived of as ‘conducting the conduct of others’ — a way of acting that influences the ways in which individuals conduct themselves. Emphasizing technologies, strategies, and disciplines, power is specifically not that which relies on direct physical intervention or determination but instead relies on the agency and free activity of the objects of power. Government, then, is the point of contact between strategies and techniques of governmentalities and techniques of the self where “technologies of domination of individuals over one another have recourse to processes by which the individual acts upon himself and, conversely, ... where techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion.”² It is techniques of the self and techniques of domination that must be examined if we are to account for subjectivities where, importantly, subjects are not determined by forms of domination. Instead, the assertion of techniques of the self or an aesthetics of existence loosens the connection between subjects and modes of subjection, where certain forms of self-fashioning might give rise to new modes of domination and new modes of domination might give rise to

¹ William Connolly, “Beyond Good and Evil: The Ethical Sensibility of Michel Foucault,” *Political Theory* 21(3) (1993): 373, emphasis original.

² Michel Foucault, “Howison Lectures: Truth and Subjectivity, October 20-21, 1980.” [audio]. Library, University of California, Berkeley. <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/foucault/howison.html>

new technologies of the self in equal manner. The relationship is neither unidirectional nor necessarily codeterminous, but either technique, in its irreducibility to the other, acts as a complimentary mechanism. It is the relationships between governmentalities and modes of self-fashioning that I am interested in — those practices of the self that are designed to support, develop, and ensure the self as a moral subject.

This interrogation will serve to build the foundation for specific analyses in chapters to follow as well as allowing us to reconsider in greater detail previous examples where moral codes produces certain aesthetic practices. The aesthetic struggle of Chris Kyle, for example, and his attempts at reconciling his inner, physic experiences with his outer portrayal of those experiences in physical form. We can see the different memorial spaces as assigning very specific aesthetic requirements and the connection between these aesthetic performances and what they are supposed to represent. The spaces of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall assign expectations similar to the aesthetic expectations of a funeral and a wake, respectively: the passive silence and physical stillness that is meant to represent solemn reflection of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier contrasted with the more active engagement with space found at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall meant to represent participation in and with the memorial. The funeral space of the tomb uphold physical distance and separation, whereas the participatory, story-sharing atmosphere of the wake/Wall is meant to be an activity that draws us together, engaging in a common event. In later chapters, we will take a further look at the aesthetic composition of the returning ‘war hero,’ the aesthetic expectations of the veteran and those wishing to ‘say thanks,’ as well as what a betrayal of these aesthetics might look like.

In Chapter Three I discussed the role of government for early liberalism as needing to adhere to a ‘natural’, rational private interest that exchange openly in a *laissez-faire* type marketplace, where it is the natural rationality of the individual actors that allows the market to operate as such. In short, a rational mode of government necessitated a tethering to the rational, free conduct of individuals. The role of government, then, was to allocate space within the existing State that allowed for such market freedom where it was able to define problems – what has to be governed – in order maintain natural conditions. Liberalism sets the limits of what a State apparatus can and must do with the understanding that such governing functions of civil society are largely capable of organizing themselves. Such a rationale allows us to think politics in a certain way and to determine forms of domination in accordance with spontaneous forms of self-governance, drawing distinctions, for example, between public and private and the institutions of morality and normalcy that were created at the interstice between the two. Such governing techniques relied upon, and were integrated with, ways that individuals conducted themselves in relation to understandings of rationality, and consisted in part on what Graham Burchell calls “the promotion in the governed population of specific techniques of the self around such questions as, for example, savings and providentialism, the acquisition of ways of performing roles like father or mother, the development of habits of cleanliness, sobriety, fidelity, self-improvement, responsibility and so on.”³

For late capitalism, in contrast, the problem of market space was redefined in terms of limits of government in its relation to the market; more specifically, it centered itself around market competition and the creation and legitimization of the State through notions of economic freedom. The rationality of neoliberal government is still tied to the rational self-conduct of

³ Graham Burchell, “Liberal government and techniques of the self,” *Economy and Society*, vol. 22 no. 3 (1993), 273.

individual actors, but it is not the ‘natural’ inclination derived from understandings of human nature but, rather, artificially arranged and developed conceptions of entrepreneurialism and competition. Rationality now dictates not only that governing institutions must be working for the purposes of ensuring market competition, but that the rational, economic model extends beyond the economy itself and into realms previously deemed off-limits or outside the purview of economic concern. As a form of governmental activism, neoliberalism is a technology of government that is geared towards a competitive rationale and, further, we might consider neoliberalism as the promotion of an enterprise culture. The application of what Burchell calls the ‘enterprise form’ to all forms of conduct: organizations and institutions, economic and non-economic alike, the conduct of government, and the conduct of individuals. This allows for, and in many ways necessitates, that the concrete forms and structures — in terms of techniques and strategies — of any particular State apparatus can and will vary.

The application of particular rationalities in schools, factories, prisons, hospitals, and so on are new and innovative and not simply reproductions of existing forms. Enterprising forms encourage governed individuals to adopt an entrepreneurial relationship to themselves in order to enhance their individual efficacy and simultaneously set the condition for the efficacy of the governing rationale itself. This involves, Burchell suggests, “‘offering’ individuals and collectives active involvement in action to resolve the kind of issues hitherto held to be the responsibility of authorized governmental agencies,” thus conferring on them the responsibility for the outcome — and more importantly conforming their conduct to the appropriate actions — such that the governed are “encouraged, freely and rationally, to conduct themselves.”⁴ In this way neoliberalism seeks to inform techniques of the self and the integration of modes of self-conduct into social practices, during the performance of which individuals alter and refine

⁴ Graham Burchell, “Liberal government and techniques of the self,” 276.

relationships to both themselves and to others. Relationships are constructed between individuals and governing rationalities that largely depend upon the ways in which individuals fashion themselves as certain kinds of subjects, asserting certain moral and ethical dispositions, where an individual's relationship to his or herself directly informs practices of freedom and notions of agency. The notions of governing rationality are centrally located in practices of the self and are the conditions for the exercise of agency as seen in daily practices of social interaction.

In Chapter Four we discussed the concern for truth and the politics of truth effects. In this chapter I develop and refine the argument for truth effects and their implications for practices of violence — those daily practices and experiences in their relationship to truth. A politics of truth determines our relationship to the present and in many ways the possible modifications we can make to that present — what claims we can make against the present in terms of the truth of ourselves and of others and what is deemed necessary to think and do. The contingency of existence at any moment opens avenues for thinking what might be otherwise, for new rules and new games, new modes and practices: by looking at current practices and rationales, a history of the present and a look at our relation to truth effects as it informs notions of existence serves as an evaluative tool for assessing the implications of such effects. More specifically, what is the cost of certain productions and practices of truth in terms of existence? In terms of self-fashioning and modes of self-practice? What sort of relations are affirmed and denied when we speak the truth of violence *this way*?

My interrogation here is on the historical contingency of violent practices and their manifestations in order to engage the effects of such practices and the subjects they produce. Violence, as a mode of relationality, is as historically contingent as the relationship of the self to the self and the self to others. It is the productive powers of violence that concerns me here —

what violence does in its productive capacity in terms of practices of the self — and my project builds on an understanding of violence not as pure or originary, but from the starting point of violence as constitutive of meaning while always understood from the concrete historical practices through which it is actualized. This is not to be confused with those arguments positing experience as some sort of construction that only exists in the language we use to talk about something.

The Function of Pain

The direct equation, ‘the larger the prisoner’s pain, the larger the torturer’s world’ is mediated by the middle term, ‘the prisoner’s absence of world’: the larger the prisoner’s pain (the smaller the prisoner’s world and therefore, by comparison) the larger the torturer’s world” ... “This phenomenon in which the claims of pain are eclipsed by the very loss of world it has brought about is a crucial step in the overall process of perception that allows one person’s physical pain to be understood as another person’s power⁵

The reality of pain is often as indescribable as it is life altering. One of the unique — and constitutive — characteristics of pain is its ability to hide from description, its unsharability, and its resistance to language. Jean Améry, discussing his experiences in the concentration camps of World War II, tells us it would be ‘totally senseless’ for him to try and describe the pain that was inflicted on him: “Was it ‘like a red-hot iron in my shoulders’, and was another ‘like a dull wooden stake that had been driven into the back of my head’? One comparison would only stand for the other, and in the end we would be hoaxed by turning on the hopeless merry-go-round of figurative speech. The pain was what it was. Beyond that there is nothing to say.”⁶ Pain not only seems to resist language and reside in a space beyond words but to actively undo language in its very unsharability. Not simply a shortcoming of any one language, a paucity of words surrounding pain, pain is rigid in its opposition to articulation. “English, which can express the

⁵ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 37.

⁶ Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities*, trans. Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 33.

thoughts of Hamlet and the tragedy of Lear, has no words for the shiver and the headache,” Virginia Woolf writes, and further “the merest schoolgirl, when she falls in love, has Shakespeare or Keats to speak her mind for her; but let a sufferer try to describe a pain in his head to a doctor and language at once runs dry.”⁷

Putting pain beyond words is common in our attempts to define the immediate experience in the presence of pain and our inability to nail down pain has long been a topic of discussion and source of conflict dating back to at least the Greeks. Tragedy, with its varying descriptions, can be generalized as a literary device that takes as its emphasis physical pain and emotional and/or mental anguish. In other words, human suffering. Tragedy serves as a mode of communicating such suffering with its audience, commenting on pain that includes the affliction of the body but also extends beyond the body and into the anguish of mental or emotional torment. Consider Oedipus in the conclusion of *Oedipus the King* who, having learned that it was he who had killed his father and married his mother, becomes himself the site of pain. Behind the castle doors and hidden from view inside the palace hangs Jocasta who, horrified over the impending truth that she “let loose that double brood — monsters — /husband by her husband, children by her child,”⁸ has taken her own life. Seeing his wife and mother swinging back and forth, Oedipus eases her from her noose and onto the ground where he removes her brooches and, looking straight up into the points, digs them down straight into his eyes over and over again. With a ‘black hail of blood pulsing, gushing down’ and nerves and clots splashing his beard, his physical pain now matching the unbearable anguish of the knowledge he possesses, leads Oedipus to exclaim, “Oh, Ohh — /the agony! *I am agony* — /where am I going? Where on earth? /where does all this agony hurl me? /where’s my voice? /winging, swept away on a dark

⁷ Virginia Woolf, *On Being Ill* (London: Hogarth Press, 1930), 6-7.

⁸ Sophocles, “Oedipus the King,” in *The Three Theban Plays: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 236.

tide.”⁹ After he makes his way in to the courtyard, Oedipus can but express his agony with cries of torment — language having given way to human moans.

In a similar manner Shakespeare’s *King Lear* ends with the wounded body and the silence engendered by pain and anguish. Lear is, from the beginning, portrayed as an old and feeble man given to his passions and the excitement of affections. One of Shakespeare’s more complex characters, he is passionate in both his cruelty and his kindness, evoking both disdain and sympathy alike from the characters in the play and as well as the audience. If tragedy is understood as a commentary on physical and emotional anguish, we can certainly see the tragic elements of *King Lear*: By the last act of the play we have traversed a tale of deceit, cunning, heartache, and betrayal that leaves us reeling from the aftermath of a family torn apart by a greed so treacherous that it lead to war, to one sibling, Goneril, poisoning another, Regan, later to commit suicide herself but only after condemning a third sister, Cordelia, to death. As a broken King Lear cradles the corpse of his beloved daughter, the faithful Cordelia, in his arms all the eloquence of Shakespearean prose falls away and we are left with the human body and its guttural noises in Lear’s reaction: “Howl, howl, howl, howl!”¹⁰

Oedipus and King Lear both demonstrate the effect of pain as a reduction of the ever-expansive world of words and intentions to the immediacy of the body and its actions — a reorientation from the sophisticated prose of canonized literature to the direct emphasis on the human body and its pain. The body and its pains are seen not as something we possess or a mere attribute of who we are but rather what we are in our entirety. When our body is in pain, the wounded body constrains our world to its immediacy such that we become our injury.

Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* draws on the centrality of injury and pain in interesting ways,

⁹ Sophocles, “Oedipus the King,” 239, emphasis added.

¹⁰ See William Shakespeare, *King Lear* (Act 5, Scene 3, line 302).

highlighting the physical injury and the ways in which pain shapes our world and ourselves as actors in it. Much like Oedipus, whose very name (“swollen foot”) refers to an injury received as an infant, Philoctetes, too, is defined in large part by the existence of a painful wound. His wound, a snake bite (on his foot as well interestingly enough), was a persistent, festering, and smelly ordeal that often cripples Philoctetes, leaving him writhing on the ground in agony. More importantly to the conversation here, his pain goes beyond a simple plot device and comes to define his character: his character is his pain.

Uncharacteristic of most Greek tragedy, Philoctetes did not receive his wound in a heroic battle with the gods or fighting for his homeland against invasion but instead by happening onto the sacred grounds of Chryse and being bitten by a snake. His pain is a relatable pain, the result of an accident that was none too fanciful and suggests a similarity to something we could identify with — not the drama of the gods but a very human ailment. The play makes note of the conflation between the inside and outside of pain, the public and the private, the internal world of suffering and the external communication of that suffering, albeit in an exaggerated commentary. Philoctetes, let us recall, was abandoned as the sole inhabitant on the island of Lemnos by Odysseus and the Greeks on their way to Troy because of his incessant cries of pain and the noisome stench coming from his now festering and putrid foot. He found himself alone one morning, deserted as a result of the writhing agony he expressed, with only a few garments and his bow, exposed to the elements. “He was lame, and no one came near him,” the chorus tells us, “he suffered, and there were no neighbors for his sorrow /with whom his cries would find answer /with whom he could lament the bloody plague /that ate him up.”¹¹ We see the dramatization of the workings of pain: the solitude of a private pain that does not bring safety in its exclusion of

¹¹ Sophocles, “Philoctetes,” in *Sophocles II: Ajax, The Women of Trachis, Electra & Philoctetes*, eds. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore, trans. David Grene (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 222.

others and the vulnerability and exposure of the pain in a public space that offers no shared communication or experience.

It is nine years later that we see Odysseus and the Greeks returning to Lemnos to retrieve Philoctetes, seeking the aid of the warrior and, more importantly, the aid of his bow (a gift from Heracles) in their battle against Troy. Like *Oedipus* and *King Lear* we see in *Philoctetes* a culminating moment that redirects our attention back to the emphasis on embodiment in pain. As Neoptolemeus is attempting to trick Philoctetes into giving up his bow, Philoctetes is struck by an overwhelming and crippling wave of pain from his wound that knocks him to his knees. Unable to bear the pain, Philoctetes first asks Neoptolemeus to amputate his limb, in a second desperate plea he then asks for his body to be burned alive in a funeral pyre before finally succumbing to his agony and collapsing flat on the ground, unconscious. Neoptolemeus stands over Philoctetes, his bow now in his possession, silent from having witnessed the agonizing struggle that just took place before him. The power of the scene lies in part in the unprompted return of Philoctetes' pain: the agony of a writhing, crippling, consciousness-eliminating pain, invisible in its approach and its delivery, that neither Philoctetes nor Neoptolemeus can seem to place.¹² After the onset of a tormenting pain, Philoctetes laments, "terrible it is, beyond words' reach. But pity me."¹³ Neoptolemeus is left alone, in the silence, with the human body, damaged and injured, having exposed his inner pain to the world.

The ways in which we become our pain, as varied and as complicated as types of pain themselves, shapes and (re)orients our world. Whether the pain is inflicted from the outside by an Other or we experience, in the case of chronic pain, for example, our bodies as the agent of

¹² "NEOPTOLEMUS: What is this thing that comes upon you so suddenly, /that makes you cry and moan so? PHILOCTETES: Do you know, boy? NEOPTOLEMUS: What is it? PHILOCTETES: Do you know, boy? NEOPTOLEMUS: What do you mean? /I do not know PHILOCTETES: Surely you know. Oh! Oh!" Sophocles, "Philoctetes," 224.

¹³ Sophocles, "Philoctetes," 224.

our suffering, pain reorders our sentient priorities. Elaine Scarry suggests in *The Body in Pain* that intense pain “destroys a person’s self and world, a destruction experienced spatially as either the contraction of the universe down to the immediate vicinity of the body or as the body swelling to fill the entire universe”¹⁴ and that “the absence of pain is a presence of world; the presence of pain is the absence of world.”¹⁵ Pain not only leads to the deconstruction of worlds, however, but is directly tied to the ways we as humans create and the meanings we derive from such creations. Ultimately we create, Scarry asserts in a sweeping argument, because of “the fact that is the work of the object realm to diminish the adversiveness of sentience, not to diminish sentience itself”¹⁶ and that human creation consists not only of the creation of an object, but of the object’s recreation of the human. Importantly, it is only because of this second function that the first is undertaken: “the object (coat, telescope, bandage) is invested with the power of creating and exists only to complete this task of recreating us (making us warm, extending vision, replacing absent skin with a present skin).”¹⁷

Violence and pain have the capacity to construct and deconstruct worlds on scales from mild annoyances that momentarily focus our attention back on to our bodies to the overwhelming immediacy of embodiment in severe pain and anguish. But what is this pain and how does it operate? The answer to this question is broader than the scope of my project here, but it would be worth taking a look at some answers to the problem of what pain is and how it works to inform notions world making and unmaking through processes of self-creation. Scarry, for example, considers pain universal. While not claiming that there are no variations in the expressibility of pain — the existence of culturally stipulated responses to pain is well documented — she asserts

¹⁴ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 35.

¹⁵ Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 37.

¹⁶ Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 305.

¹⁷ Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 310.

that such examples of cultural differences, when taken collectively, only serve to confirm the ‘universal sameness’ of the central problem of pain: “a problem that originates much less in the inflexibility of any one language or in the shyness of any one culture than in the utter rigidity of pain itself: its resistance to language is not simply one of its incidental or accidental attributes but is essential to what it is.”¹⁸ Many commentators on *The Body in Pain*, however, push against Scarry’s differentiation between physical pain and psychological suffering, where ‘resistance to language’ — the inexpressibility factor — only applies for Scarry to physical pain whereas psychological suffering *can* be expressed.

David Morris in *The Culture of Pain*, for example, pursues a different path than Scarry and her distinction between physical pain and mental/emotional pain, believing the experience of pain does not allow for the demarcation between physical and ‘only in our heads’. In other words, what one person sees (or is diagnosed) as physical pain, another might see as the result of the pain center in the brain or as a psychological issue, returning us back to the point where we started — the meaning of the pain for the sufferer. Importantly for Morris, pain “is not simply an automatic and unchanging response somehow hard wired in the body” but must first be processed by sentient beings with brains “that belong to individuals who in turn exist only within human history and within specific cultures.”¹⁹ Rather than strictly demarcating physical pain and psychological/emotional pain, or suggesting that ‘a pain is a pain is pain,’ everywhere and eternally all the same, Morris asserts that pain can be described as “always a cerebral phenomenon in the sense that it is never simply a sensation but rather something that the time-

¹⁸ Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 5.

¹⁹ David B. Morris, *The Culture of Pain* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1991), 28.

bound brain interprets and that the time-bound mind constructs: a specific human artifact bearing the marks of its specific human history.”²⁰

Many commentators on *The Body in Pain* also push against Scarry’s conception of the universality of pain as aversive. She asserts that “pain is in its essential nature ‘aversiveness,’ and thus even within technical medical definitions is recognized as something which cannot be felt without being wished unfelt.”²¹ She is referring, in part, to the work of Ronald Melzack who, as a ‘leading theoretician in the physiology of pain’ asserts in his book *The Puzzle of Pain* that “if injury or any other noxious input fails to evoke negative affect and aversive drive the experience cannot be called pain.”²² David Morris’ argument, while resisting Scarry in some ways, has a sophisticated enough understanding of Scarry’s intricate and complicated arguments to recognize when they are talking past each other. Morris is not necessarily attempting to refute Scarry or to provide a counter-theory addressing the origin and development of human culture but, rather, to address the issues of acute and chronic pain from the understanding that pain is always historical — always shaped and reshaped by a particular place, time, and culture and by individuals themselves. Pain for Morris is not timeless, a purely mechanical operation involving nerves and tissues, but “is something we implicitly or consciously mobilize for specific social and personal purposes. We use pain almost as regularly — and sometimes as cunningly — as pain uses us.”²³ Scarry is talking specifically about torture and not (the typical go-to in discussions on pain and aversion) something like masochism where individuals control the pain they enjoy through a contractual understanding (meaning among other things, a multi-sided agreement) of an encounter that include things like safe words and an understood agreement

²⁰ Morris, *The Culture of Pain*, 28-9.

²¹ Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 290.

²² Ronald Melzack, *The Puzzle of Pain* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 47. See Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, Chapter One n.62.

²³ Morris, *The Culture of Pain*, 175.

prior to entrance. Such procedures aren't normative for instances of torture, where consent doesn't enter the encounter.²⁴

But lets go back to the statement above where I suggested that masochists control 'the pain they enjoy.' It is commonplace enough to object to the suggestion that one might desire pain; that one might seek it out, much less enjoy it. Pain is something we recoil from and take measures to prevent. Someone who actively seeks pain, physical or emotional, must be acting out in such a way as to address another, normal desire — it isn't that they truly desire pain. There is something abnormal about such an individual and we explain it away in many ways: perhaps those who desire pain are not physiologically speaking "wired correctly" so they feel pain as pleasure. Or perhaps the masochist is in fact still pursuing pleasure, only pleasure delayed where the masochism itself is only a means to an end — they don't enjoy the pain itself but only what the pain gives them. Pleasure. The concept of delayed pleasure or of pain as a means to an end is recognizable in the way we swallow bitter medicine: we don't drink the aggressive tasting liquid for itself, but only as a means towards recovering our health. We don't really desire the bitter tasting medicine because, given the option, we would all undoubtedly take our health without having to take the medicine; that is, we would take the end without the means. But this is the easy way out. All we are saying is that we desire nothing, it is not the object of our desire that we are really after (the means), but instead pleasure itself (the ends). All pursuits in the name of desire — erotic entanglements, our favorite foods, a stroll on the beach, the company of our friends — is really nothing more than the desire for pleasure. But this won't do. Pleasure as the satisfaction of desire would mean the death of desire.

²⁴ Curtis Brown, "Elaine Scarry with Curtis Brown," in *Bidoun Magazine*, Fall 2006. <http://bidoun.org/issues/8-interview>.

Certainly there are bitter or painful things outside of medicine that we enjoy for more than causal reasons. The easy response to the enjoyment of a “good burn” one receives from a workout is that what is enjoyed is not in fact ‘the burn’ itself but, rather, the competitive edge gained in a sport (victory) or fitness itself (body composition or health). The pain is, again, just a means. But if pain was only a means, then we should be able to do away with it in the same manner as the bitter medicine and keep the ends — athletic victory, say — itself. It is fairly obvious however that at least part of the pleasure derived from athletic victory is tied with struggle — the pain of preparation and training. We would have no interest in watching Superman run a foot race against even the best Olympic competitors nor would such an event have any appeal for Superman. How we experience pain is largely determined by how we understand it. To recognize something as tragic, for example, is to perceive it in certain ways and to extract certain things from it. The opposite is also true: to not recognize something as a tragedy is to not extract certain things, to miss things. If, as I suggested earlier, we think of tragedy as an emphasis on human physical and emotional pain we can see the modern trajectory away from the tragic and our efforts to thwart it. Modern medicine, for example, can be seen as a means of avoiding the tragic, of preventing and healing the tragic to the greatest extent possible. Yet tragedy still fills the streets and pervades the world around us in many ways. Joyce Carol Oates in a book concerning the relationship between tragedy and the public arena asserts that boxing has become “America’s tragic theater.”²⁵ So what is it about boxing?

Oates sees the modern absence of tragedy in its conventional form as an opening for more unconventional forms. Boxing isn’t the tragedy that Aristotle describes, yet it carries the *pathos* Aristotle necessitates and places the vulnerability of the human body at center stage, so much so that the identity of boxing — a boxer — is a body. The human body is the main event,

²⁵ Joyce Carol Oates, *On Boxing* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1987), 116.

the main attraction, and the storyboard of the events unfolding in the ring. Tragedy. In *On Boxing*, Oates calls the obsessive appeal for those finding boxing not only a spectacle of physical skill but also ‘an emotional experience impossible to convey in words’ the ‘paradox of boxing’. As we fixate on the bare body and its inevitable defeat, boxing, as an “art form with no natural analogue in the arts,” “forces our reluctant acknowledgment that the most profound experiences of our lives are physical events — though we believe ourselves to be, and surely are, essentially spiritual beings.”²⁶ The boxer is a tragic actor. In important ways the tragic violence of boxing bleeds into the violence of the world. We can compare the violence and the very real pain of the boxer with the freshly eye-less Oedipus or the crippling injury sustained by Philoctetes. Boxing is a stylized form of tragedy as played out on the world stage, an event culminating — an event achieved — only with the defeat of the specifically human form. Affirming such tragic pain, the inescapable defeat inherent in boxing (and traditional tragedies), however, Oates asserts that “the boxer prefers physical pain in the ring to the absence of pain that is ideally the condition of ordinary life” as a pain that allows them to transcend everyday life and serves as a creative force — the “systematic cultivation of pain in the interests of a project, a life-goal.”²⁷

Could it be that we have altogether misconstrued what pleasure is, falling prey to what Wittgenstein would call the ‘grammatical illusion’ of pleasure and pain? He suggests to us in §110 of *Investigations* that “‘Language (or thought) is something unique’ — this proves to be a superstition (*not* a mistake!), itself produced by grammatical illusions. And now the impressiveness retreats to these illusions, to the problems.”²⁸ He goes on, describing our attempts to grasp the essence of a proposition: “One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing’s

²⁶ Joyce Carol Oates, *On Boxing*, 99.

²⁷ Joyce Carol Oates, *On Boxing*, 25-6. Boxing, in this way, Oates interestingly compares to writers and the writing process.

²⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1953).

nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it” – “A *picture* held us captive.”²⁹ The grammatical uses of pleasure and pain are very different and play different roles in our capacity to employ language (think pain’s ability to shatter language) and the unique role of pain compared to other interior states. More specifically, most pleasures have intentional objects whereas most pains do not. Most interior states, pleasure as one example, are tied to objects in the external world — we do not merely have feelings, but typically have *pleasure in* something, have feelings *for* something or someone, fear *of* something. Pain, however, unlike other states of consciousness, lacks this referential content and is not *of* or *for* anything. Scarry suggests that “it is precisely because it takes no object that it [pain], more than any other phenomenon, resists objectification in language.”³⁰ The suggestion here being that it is the oversimplified use of the words pleasure and pain that restricts its use in our lives; the illusion engendered by the tendency to hold on to one underlying meaning of a word – pleasure, pain – and to offer one simple explanation for the many uses of each word. It is not just masochists and boxers, but all of us who — to some degree and in certain forms — enjoy pain.

Foucault, Aesthetics, and the Art of Living

My interest here is not in defending Foucault’s aesthetics from its many critics, per se, but in arguing for aesthetics as an ethical project through an articulation of Foucauldian aesthetics. We cannot rid ourselves of aesthetics or the aesthetics that accompanies violence and my use of Foucault is structured around employing his thought towards a new mode of addressing the problem of the aesthetic/ethical relationships we have with violence. Put another way, my focus is on addressing the problems of subjectivation and truth as it informs

²⁹ Wittgenstein, *Investigations*, §114 and 115, respectively. Emphasis original.

³⁰ Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 5. See also 160-170.

contemporary notions of violence. As historians of the present, we can situate a space, a place, we currently reside in within the Western tradition and its thinking on the morality of violence. We have a long philosophical tradition of defining and guiding our conceptions of ethics and morality by universal codes that apply to all people in all places at all times, as determined by objectively verifiable rules. Such rules are the result of rational inquiry into objective, unbiased moral truths. The holding power of a moral code does, after all, reside in this objectivity: we are not merely following the whim of a tyrant, but conforming to truths about reality discovered through rational (Enlightenment, universal) thought. Transcending all personal and contextual biases, we seek unchanging metaphysical foundations with which to make distinctions between right and wrong, moral and immoral, and the corresponding modes of behavior. If the use of reason to discern the moral from the immoral has been the tradition for philosophy there has, of course, been no consensus as to which moral offering is the most reasonable one.

The lack of consensus amongst the Marxists, the Christians, the Buddhists, the Utilitarians, the Rawlsians, and so on does not necessarily mean, however, that theirs is a flawed project. Some assert that a lack of consensus means a lack of a moral truth altogether, others assert that morality has no rational foundation or that perhaps it is humans themselves who are irrational and as such have no access to moral truths. Some theorists are, of course, more dubious of attempts to uncover a natural metaphysical foundation of morality, going beyond critiquing the specific goals of individual philosophers and undermining the very possibility of universalizable codes altogether, uprooting ‘philosophy as the mirror of nature’.³¹ If truth resides in the human construction of language with its irrecoverable slipperiness such that our perception and understanding is always mediated through such social constructions and interpretive

³¹ See Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Cambridge: Princeton University Press, 1981). See also Nietzsche, Foucault, Derrida, Kuhn, and so on.

communities, what then is to become of the search for a universal moral code?³² Or the distinct lack of such a code? It is here that my attention turns to aesthetics as an alternative mode of ethical practice as a way of experiencing contemporary existence.

In the pursuit of the aesthetic as an alternative and the problematization of conceptions of the self and truth we must consider the ways in which we as individuals can and do maneuver within fields of experience. That is, the ways in which we create and construct the world that is at the same time constructing our experiences — the ways in which we can and do act upon ourselves, to self-fashion, and to create. It is the relationship of the self to the self that is the realm of ethics and instead of asking ourselves what the rational moral truth is under which to codify our behavior, we should be asking ourselves what the relationship is between ourselves and processes of self-creation. Asking how we can experience ourselves in the processes of becoming. What then is aesthetics as an alternative and how might it relate to the ‘art of living’? Along these lines, I follow Jane Bennett who identifies, among others, two advantages of turning to aesthetics in discussions of ethics and morality: first, it is because in the realm of the aesthetic that “the *constructed* character of moral agents and principles comes to the fore as they are likened to *pieces of work* like sculptures, carvings, pottery, to things worked and reworked in ways never free from the mark or force of prior embodiments, intentions, or accidents;” and second, insofar as ‘art’ is a call for a certain mode of perception, that is, “an attention to things as sensuous *ensembles* (scenes, songs, stories, dances), an artistic representation of ethics may reveal with special force its structural or network character.”³³

³² See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) and Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Princeton: Harvard University Press, 1980).

³³ Jane Bennett, “‘How Is It, Then, That We Still Remain Barbarians?’ Foucault, Schiller, and the Aestheticization of Ethics,” in *Political Theory* vol. 24 (4)(1996): 667.

Like most other things Western, the orientation of the word ‘aesthetics’ has been increasingly narrowed and compartmentalized in the last few centuries. We have the skepticism of Plato in *The Republic* that questions the value of art and sensory information, art being the mere truthless form of *mimesis* — a corrupting representation.³⁴ We have the defense of sensory experience and art as catharsis by Aristotle in *The Politics* and *Poetics*.³⁵ A derivative from Greek root words meaning sensitive and perceptive or to perceive through the senses, modern uses of ‘aesthetic’ have traversed a fairly broad spectrum of application. Alexander Baumgarten took it to mean a criticism of taste in the mid-1700s, a philosophical investigation of beauty in particular but also included sensuous perception writ large. The use of ‘aesthetics’ was largely influenced by Kant who, elaborating on Baumgarten’s employment, defined the term in the more classical sense as “the science which treats of the conditions of sensuous perception,” (*The Critique of Pure Reason*). It was later, after the English translation of Kant’s *The Critique of Judgement* in the 1800s, that we would come to understand aesthetics as the experience of and with beauty. Both Kant and Baumgarten included nature in their aesthetic judgments, whereas Hegel (in)famously limited the term to the application of the “spacious *realm of the beautiful*; more precisely, their province is *art*, or, rather, *fine art*.”³⁶ Contemporary employments largely continue this reduction to applications concerning judgment, taste, and beauty and regard aesthetics as a philosophical concern that typically deals with ‘fine’ or ‘high’ art in an ocular-centric fashion.

As I approach the idea of aesthetics generally, and the aesthetics of existence in particular, I am not concerned, in an outright manner, with the nature or essence of ‘art’. I am

³⁴ Plato, “Book X,” in *The Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992).

³⁵ Aristotle, *The Politics and The Constitution of Athens* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

³⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 1. Emphasis original.

interested in, rather, undoing this connection between modes of living and self-fashioning that is tied to thinking about judgment and taste in this now common usage. In other words, in undoing the space set aside for things to be properly artistic, things here meaning specifically objects (*objet d'art*) that are produced by certain geniuses or experts and not by individuals on to life itself. Why is it that a painting or a sculpture, or a lamp and the house, are works of art and not lives themselves and the ways in which we live them? What is it about this space that we have set aside for art — what is it that attracts us to a ‘work of art’? Is it merely its being classified as such, as *art*, or does it have something more to do with what art does and not the object itself? Is it the bourgeois game of collecting that generates appeals to art or is it the powerful, affectionate draw and the singularity of a given work of art that overwhelms us towards the sublime and the Beautiful? The work of the sublime that makes the unrepresentable present or of the beautiful that exists by itself, for itself, and with itself is not what I am after here. The category of ‘art’ has no particular place in the self-fashioning that I seek.

The category of art does nothing to draw our attention to the singularity that places itself before us. As a criticism (“that’s not *art*”) or in praise of some thing (“now *that’s art*”) the category as such is rather vacuous and leaves the things on which we comment unattended to. Perhaps we prefer it this way, not detailing our comments and engaging the particulars because it frees us of the burden of what it is, exactly, that we like — what constitutes it as art. Free to disengage and leave the particulars to the experts. To the Artist. To the Collectors. How, then, are we to think our lives aesthetically, to fashion ourselves to some form of aesthetic technique or value? Foucault’s approach was an ethical disposition that aimed itself at transforming the self into a work of art. Here’s Foucault: “But couldn’t everyone’s life become a work of art? Why would the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life? ... From the idea that the self is

not given to us, I think there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art.”³⁷

Foucault can be, and has been, seen as merely attempting to expand the autonomous category and space of art to the category and space of life — making the category more inclusive but retaining the ‘work’ that it does. Gordon Bearn, for example, distances himself from Foucault because he sees the work of art as a guiding principle misleading for his own project: “Making your life a work of art is too much like carving a statue, subtraction not addition, and besides there are so many more beautiful things than there are works of art. Art seemed too particular a notion.”³⁸ While Bearn opts for a Deleuzean path towards more generous notions of beauty and, more importantly for him, towards ‘becoming beautiful’ in the sense of becoming becoming, I think he is too restrictive in his portrayal of Foucault. I believe there to be something more to the work that Foucault is doing that allows us to open up spaces for self-fashioning and for self-creation and it is in this regard that the work of Foucault strikes me. But what work, then, is Foucault and his notion of ethics as an ‘aesthetics of existence’ — as an art of living — doing?

The primary sources of Foucault’s discussion on this relationship is to be found in volumes two and three of *The History of Sexuality* (*The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, respectively) along with multiple interviews given in the early 1980s where we find that his concern, as with his earlier projects, is that of truth and subjectivation. With Christianity, Foucault tells us, came a slow and gradual shift in morality away from the self-stylized liberty that was moral practice in Antiquity. In Antiquity, morality was “mainly an attempt to affirm one’s liberty and to give one’s own life a certain form in which one could recognize oneself, be

³⁷ Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress,” in *The Essential Works Of Michel Foucault Vol. 1, Ethics*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997), 261-2.

³⁸ Gordon C.F. Bearn, *Life Drawing: A Deleuzean Aesthetics of Existence* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 14. See also 206.

recognized by others, and even which posterity might take as an example.”³⁹ The passage from Antiquity to Christianity was a passage from morality as a search for a personal ethics to morality as obedience to a codified system of rules. This system of rules, of morality as obedience to a codified system, Foucault sees as disappearing, if not already gone, and it is “to this absence of morality corresponds, must correspond, the search for an aesthetics of existence.”⁴⁰ Interesting here is the *must* that Foucault employs because it is an historical, rather than a moral, *must*. It is not, in other words, a moral imperative that compels us to an aesthetics of existence but an historical inevitability that Foucault seems to be suggesting: if the self is not given to us, then we *must* create it.

Kant, the Greeks, and the Autonomy of the Aesthetic

Foucault sees the problems facing modernity as similar to the problems that the Greeks encountered: the constitution of an ethics founded not on codified moral law nor a truthful, Rational (Enlightenment) understanding of the self but instead on an aesthetics of existence. “Recent liberation movements,” Foucault tells us, “suffer from the fact that they cannot find any principle on which to base the elaboration of a new ethics. They need an ethics, but they cannot find any other ethics than an ethics founded on so-called scientific knowledge of what the self is, what desire is, what the unconscious is, and so on.”⁴¹ It is here that Foucault turns to the possibility of aesthetics as a starting point. What motivates his consideration of the aesthetic as a response to the absence of traditional moral systems is his consideration of the subject as a product of discursive practices. Importantly, the subject here is not completely passive, not simply the docile body: if it is true a ‘mad’ individual results from a system of coercion, “you

³⁹ Michel Foucault, “An Aesthetics of Existence,” in *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy and Culture*, ed. Lawrence Kritzman (New York: Routledge, 1990), 49.

⁴⁰ Foucault, “An Aesthetics of Existence,” 49.

⁴¹ Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics,” 255-56.

know full well that the mad subject is not a non-free subject and that the mentally ill constitutes himself a mad subject in relationship and in the presence of the one who declares him crazy.”⁴²

While Foucault is interested in technologies of the self and acts of self-creation, acts of self-fashioning, he makes it clear that such practices are limited to the experiences — the practices — set forth by sociohistorical contingency that are available for appropriation. Following Nietzsche (recall the discussion from Chapter Four), practices of the self are not something completely spontaneous that individuals invent themselves but are, rather, “patterns that he finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested and imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group.”⁴³

As we proceed through Foucault’s mobilization of the aesthetic, it is important to note that Foucault himself did not outline any systematic account of the relationship between politics and aesthetics nor did he develop any sort of direct formulation for an aesthetic-based ethics. Such a blueprint would, of course, be antithetical to his project. It was the possibility of a non-normalizing mode of self-fashioning made through personal choices that attracted Foucault to the Greeks and to the possibility of bringing politics together with aesthetics. Self-fashioning and one’s relationship with oneself was at the heart of Greek ethical practices and if we are to understand the relationship between the two must also understand Greek aesthetics. Down stream from this, and more importantly for the attempts we are making here, is what Foucault took from the Greeks, and what he left behind. I will develop my argument further but it is important enough to mention now that Foucault is not suggesting a ‘return to the Greeks’ in any wholesale fashion. Many critiques of his aesthetics involves accusations of fascist inclinations, at worst, or permission, at least, that come from certain Greek notions that they see Foucault as

⁴² Michel Foucault, “The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom: An Interview with Michel Foucault on January 20, 1984,” in *Philosophy and Social Criticism* vol. 12 (1987): 122.

⁴³ Foucault, “The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom,” 122.

adopting. His is not an uncritical adoption, however; he in fact tells us he found many Greek practices “quite disgusting.”⁴⁴

There are, of course, many critiques of Foucault’s suggestions in the realm of an aesthetics based ethics. They concern, in large part, the role of the aesthetic; more specifically, the autonomy of the aesthetic in Foucault’s self-styling and the line that is drawn roughly between (post)Kantian conceptions and that of the Greeks. As we discussed previously, Foucault is interested in employing the category of art to all aspects of life and not just to objects that currently reside in the autonomous space of ‘Art’ (‘But couldn’t everyone’s life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life?’). Andrew Thacker, for instance, believes that Foucault is ‘insufficiently attentive’ to the distinctions between Greek and Kantian aesthetics and Baudelaire’s dandyism.⁴⁵ Such lack of clarity makes Foucault’s aim — the application of his aesthetics to contemporary problems — problematic, where the ‘semantic slipperiness’ of Foucault’s use of the term aesthetic in discussions of techniques of the self makes it difficult, if at all possible, to discern the normative criteria for distinguishing between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ forms of social practice. It is this ‘slipperiness’ that I aim to wade through and show that the confusion lies not in Foucault’s aesthetic trajectory but, rather, the question and the thus the expectations placed on the direction Foucault takes his aesthetic. Neither Greek nor Kantian, Foucault follows a Nietzschean path towards self-styling and the becoming of who we are.

If Foucault is applying the traditional Greek conception of the ethical/aesthetic arrangement where there is no separation of art and everyday existence, Thacker tells us, the institutionalized autonomous art that holds sway in contemporary understandings holds no

⁴⁴ Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics,” 258.

⁴⁵ Andrew Thacker, “Foucault’s Aesthetics of Existence,” in *Radical Philosophy* 63 (Spring 1993): 13-21.

intrinsic ethical content and denies attempts to aestheticize one's life. It simply won't work he tells us: "Creating the self in the present according to contemporary aesthetic principles, *the only ones currently available to us*, could not produce an ethical art object only an autonomous one."⁴⁶ Richard Wolin,⁴⁷ who is unsympathetic in his attack of Foucault's aesthetics, agrees that the autonomous nature of art is a permanent feature of modernity and it is in art's autonomy that its critical authority resides (again, something Foucault is not concerned with maintaining and, as I am arguing, not his understanding or employment of art to begin with). Speaking from a viewpoint given to us by Habermas, that of three autonomous, mutually exclusive realms of experience (science, morality, and art), "It is not enough," Wolin says of Foucault, "that *objects* are artistic."⁴⁸ We can almost hear the urgency in Wolin's voice here; the *dread* of the catastrophe that would necessarily follow if 'art' were to spill over the top of its container and open a Pandora's box of authoritarian opportunity. For Wolin, Foucault, like Nietzsche, "refuses to respect the separate 'inner logics' in differentiated realms of human cognition."⁴⁹

Wolin is following a long tradition of connecting aesthetics to fascist politics, and Foucault's aesthetics is no exception. The worry is that, in Wolin's language, Foucault's 'panaestheticism' spreads the domain of the aesthetic to other aspects of life, thereby stripping art of its aesthetic specificity — its power of critique. The downstream effect, Wolin argues, being the fascistic domination of others in one's pursuit of self-fashioning where Foucault's 'aesthetic decisionism' constitutes an immoral social practice devoid of "human solidarity, mutuality, or fellow-feeling" and promotes an authoritarian and fascistic demeanor of "outwardly directed, aggressive self aggrandizement" to such an extent that it would foster "forms of life that

⁴⁶ Thacker, "Foucault's Aesthetics of Existence," 13. Emphasis mine.

⁴⁷ Richard Wolin, "Foucault's Aesthetic Decisionism," in *Telos* vol. 67 (Spring 1986): 71-86.

⁴⁸ Wolin, "Foucault's Aesthetic Decisionism," 84. Emphasis mine.

⁴⁹ Wolin, "Foucault's Aesthetic Decisionism," 73.

are manipulative and predatory *vis-à-vis* other persons,” ultimately culminating in catastrophic nihilism.⁵⁰ While following certain conceptions of the aesthetic can certainly lead to a fascist politics, the purely formal act of following an aesthetic in fashioning one’s self does not necessitate such politics — it, of course, depends on the understanding of aesthetics involved. Foucault, for example, tells us that his aesthetics of existence is “a question of knowing how to govern one’s own life in order to give it the most beautiful possible form (in the eyes of others, of oneself, and of the future generations for which one might serve as an example).”⁵¹

For Kant, art is bequeathed to us by the genius of the artist where the work of art is primarily just that: *art*, an object in a category by itself. German Idealism and Romanticism ran with this understanding. Artistic production for the Greeks, on the other hand, focused more on a piece of art as a *work*, something done by a tradesman or an artisan. Consider, for example, that the etymological roots for Greek term for art, *techne*, is closer to ‘technique’ than to the autonomous category of ‘art’ that we employ today. We get an important glimpse into Foucault’s take on Greek aesthetics if we consider a more literal translation of what is usually translated as ‘aesthetics of existence’. *Techne tou biou*, rather than meaning the art of existence (aesthetics) as the pursuit of the Beautiful or even the sublime as transcendence, can be taken to mean ‘technique of existence’. Such techniques are, of course, what Foucault is directly interested in — the techniques of the self that one employs in order to give ethical form to one’s life. Much of modern art criticism holds that the autonomous space of art must be upheld if art is to maintain its critical edge. Foucault is not concerned with maintaining an autonomous realm of art because his aesthetics is not concerned with the critical power of art as art. Let us recall that Foucault is searching for a non-normalizing ethics that comes from self-styling and not a universal code

⁵⁰ Wolin, “Foucault’s Aesthetic Decisionism,” 84-5.

⁵¹ Michel Foucault, “The Concern for Truth,” in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984*, ed. Lawrence Kritzman (New York: Routledge, 1990), 259.

because such codes, or here the autonomy of the aesthetic, only serve to restrict potentialities. For an action to be moral, he tells us, “it must not be reducible to an act or series of acts conforming to a rule, a law, or a value;” in this way, Foucault is decidedly anti-Kantian, but he goes further, stating that there is no “moral conduct that does not call for the forming of oneself as an ethical subject; and no forming of the ethical subject without ‘modes of subjectivation’ and an ‘ascetics’ or ‘practices of the self’ that support them.”⁵²

Foucault himself is generally not directly accused of asserting a fascist politics, but the implications are obviously there: he is not being accused of a historical fascism but, rather, the more general argument that a politics which privileges the aesthetic tends towards authoritarian notions of self promotion over the well-being of others. It would be worth interrogating the purported connection between aesthetics and fascism as it has a persistent history in 20th century political thought. The fatalism/resignationism of such thought is rather alarming: most critiques that link aesthetics to authoritarian politics do so from a position that is grossly (in both senses of the word) accepting of contemporary normative arrangements concerning art, politics, and the separation of the two. Art, in its critically autonomous role, so the story goes, allows us a removed space, a critical vantage point over other social aspects. To tamper with this space or rearrange the contemporary normative aesthetics principles, to suggest that things could be differently arranged, is to promote barbarism and terroristic practices. Needless to say, necessitating art in this role, and limiting the aesthetic to those forms and spaces ‘currently available to us’ is certainly something we should reject outright.

⁵² Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 28.

Timothy O’Leary’s⁵³ interrogation of Foucauldian ethics is illuminating, particularly in regards to (indirect) accusations of fascist politics leveled against Foucault. O’Leary seeks to identify any potential in Foucault’s attempts to aestheticize politics for a fascist politics — in other words, is Foucault’s ethics in some way ‘useful’ for fascism? In interrogating the ‘possible affinities’ between Foucault’s aesthetics/ethics and fascism, O’Leary works through Walter Benjamin and Lacoue-Labarthe’s account of a fascist aestheticization of politics. O’Leary focuses primarily on Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” to demonstrate Benjamin’s elaboration on an aesthetic turn to politics. In this well known work, Benjamin offers a critique of the work of art, suggesting that art is in the processes of losing or has already lost its traditional dependence on what he calls ‘aura’ in the age of mechanical reproduction. The ‘aura’, Benjamin informs us, stems from a work of art’s origin in the ‘sacred’ and the ‘ritual,’ which he characterizes as a “unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be.”⁵⁴ This simultaneous distancing and presencing by the aura is what is lost by a works reproduction, thus changing the aura’s role (the function of art) in society. Mechanical reproducibility frees the art from its ‘parasitical dependence on ritual’, no longer allowing judgment based on notions of authenticity, thus reversing the ‘total function’ of the work: “instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice — politics.”⁵⁵

Part of Benjamin’s project included the assertion that every epoch which undergoes a shattering of tradition also experiences a movement in the opposite direction, towards a renewal of tradition. Following this thinking, O’Leary asserts that in the face of ‘our present destruction

⁵³ Timothy O’Leary, *Foucault and the Art of Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2002). See also Timothy O’Leary, “Foucault, Politics and the Autonomy of the Aesthetic,” in *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* Vol. 4 (2): 273-291.

⁵⁴ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Fontana, 1973) cited in O’Leary, “Foucault, Politics and the Autonomy of the Aesthetic,” 277.

⁵⁵ Benjamin (1973) cited in O’Leary, “Foucault, Politics and the Autonomy of the Aesthetic,” 277.

of tradition' we have two possible responses: the ritualized response whereby we aestheticize politics or a political response whereby we politicize art. Benjamin is strongly on the side of politicization — the contemporary force that would favor the ritualization of art being, of course, fascism. Pointing out the crucial distinctions between 'aestheticized politics' and 'politicized art', O'Leary notes that by politicized art Benjamin would "mean an art which resists ritualization and the imposition of aura, *not* an art which is pressed into the service of a political regime;" and by aestheticized politics he would mean a politics (like fascism) "which functions precisely through the ritualization of political life."⁵⁶

For Benjamin, an aestheticized politics (re)organizes the masses — while maintaining existing property systems — by simply giving them 'a chance to express themselves' in places like rallies, sporting events, and parades where populations are brought 'face to face with themselves' and are given the opportunity to aestheticize themselves. Such portrayals of aesthetic expression proceed to ritualize political life, saturating populations with auratic cult object, where the aesthetic (ritualized values) begin to take precedence over notions of political rights. Human perception itself is affected by this exposure of the masses to themselves through mechanical means such as the newsreels, televised events, and the camera. He suggests that the process of bringing the masses face to face is "intimately connected with the development of the techniques of reproduction and photography. Mass movements are usually discerned more clearly by a camera than by the naked eye" and that "mass movements, including war, constitute a form of human behavior which particularly favors mechanical equipment."⁵⁷ Fascism can condition humanity so as to experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure by subjecting the modern individual to "a series of shocks to the sensory system which have the effect of

⁵⁶ O'Leary, "Foucault, Politics and the Autonomy of the Aesthetic," 277.

⁵⁷ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," In *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1968), 251 n21.

provoking a state of anaesthesia, and it is this state, in turn, which makes possible the attitude towards the world which Benjamin summarizes in the slogan ‘*Fiat ars — pereat mundus*’ (‘Make art — let the world perish’).”⁵⁸

For Lacoue-Labarthe, too, O’Leary tells us, the aim of National-Socialism was to aestheticize politics, going so far as to refer to National-Socialism as ‘National-Aestheticism’. Asking the more critical and pertinent question of the relationship between aesthetics and politics, however, O’Leary posits we should interrogate the precise nature of the aesthetic models that fascism invokes, rather than ascribing a fascist politics to any and all aesthetic endeavors.⁵⁹ Towards such an investigation, O’Leary, focusing less on historical fascism than with the trail of thought left in its wake, works through Marinetti, Italian futurism, and German and Italian fascism. In particular, he focuses on their themes of ‘completeness, hardness and virility,’ questioning the assumption of an image in German and Italian fascism identified by three defining traits: uniformity, permanence, and clarity. With these terms in mind it becomes easy to understand and recognize the fascist politician as ‘artist statesman’ constructing a unified, purified state with definitive goals and a definitive direction. As O’Leary argues, if there is “something characteristic about the fascist aestheticization of politics, then it must be sought in this insistence upon the ideal of a non-fractured subject which finds itself reassuringly reflected in a non-fractured, uniform public space.”⁶⁰

As we have seen, this is obviously not what Foucault had in mind with his aesthetics: uniformity and permanence are exactly what was to be done away with, replaced with fragmentation and instability — the contingency of moments. He spent decades arguing against and dismantling unified totalities as systems and as subjectivities: we need only recall his ‘death

⁵⁸ O’Leary, “Foucault, Politics and the Autonomy of the Aesthetic,” 278.

⁵⁹ O’Leary, “Foucault, Politics and the Autonomy of the Aesthetic,” 279.

⁶⁰ O’Leary, “Foucault, Politics and the Autonomy of the Aesthetic,” 281.

of man' and that for Foucault "the search for a form of morality acceptable for everyone — in the sense that everyone would have to submit to it — seems catastrophic."⁶¹

Aesthetics as Critique

Foucault sees a modernity lacking — or rejecting — an ethics founded on religion and/or the intervention of legal/institutional systems into our personal, private lives. Modernity can find no elaboration for a new ethics, he asserts, other than an ethics stemming from scientific knowledge of what the self is, what desire and the unconscious is. When asked if the Greeks provide a viable alternative to such foundations he responds with an emphatic "No!" and tells us that "you can't find the solution of a problem in the solution of another problem raised at another moment by other people."⁶² Foucault is interested in the history of problematizations, in a genealogy of problems: how, why, and in what way a problem appears at a given time and place. Sexuality as it was problematized by Greeks in the 4th century B.C.E. was not the same kind of problem it was for the Christians of the 16th century C.E., for example. Knowledge of these practices can, however, serve as aids in attempts made at understanding the problems we face today.⁶³

Ethics as an aesthetic of existence stands in direct opposition to moralities founded by scientific knowledge of the self and one's desires and to the (neo)Kantian/liberal blend currently in play in much of the Western world. Foucault asserts that subjectivity is not a fixed reality but a never ceasing historical and linguistic construction that constitutes an infinite series of differing subjectivities and he criticizes the idea of autonomous subjects making rational moral judgments. His search is for the possibility of an ethics without a presupposed subject and the ways in which an ethical subject problematizes one's self and employs technologies of the self towards self-

⁶¹ Michel Foucault, "The Return of Morality," 254.

⁶² Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics," 256.

⁶³ Michel Foucault, "What our Present Is," in *The Politics of Truth* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), 141-2.

fashioning. When Foucault (in)famously announced in *The Order of Things* the death of man as an epistemological subject, he asked us to consider whether or not ‘man’ ever really existed. Further, if ‘Man’ was unknown before the late 1700s, what are the implications for science, for thought, for truth if man as such did not exist? To ask such a question, he tells us, is merely an indulgence in paradox. Paradoxical because we are so “blinded by the recent manifestation of man that we can no longer remember a time — and it is not so long ago — when the world, its order, and human beings existed, but man did not.”⁶⁴ It is no longer possible for modernity to think other than in the void left by man’s disappearance, he tells us, and Foucault’s proposition is to think the end of man as the return of the beginning of philosophy: “It is nothing more, and nothing less, than the unfolding of a space in which it is once more possible to think.”⁶⁵

This new thinking in wake of disappeared man continues throughout Foucault’s work — the subject as replaceable occupant in discursive formations in *The Archeology of Knowledge*,⁶⁶ the normalizing productive forces of surveillance and discipline in *Discipline and Punish*,⁶⁷ and so on — is a way of thinking about the ‘I’ and the ‘subject’ in terms linguistic positioning and as an object for the twin operations of power and knowledge. Such thinking unfolds in *The Use of Pleasure* as an investigation into ‘games of truth’ and the ways in which, via modalities of relations to the self, an individual constitutes and recognizes him or herself as a subject. Games of truth, as the ‘games of truth and error through which being is historically constituted as experience,’ is something that must be thought. Truth games are for Foucault experienced as truth and power relations and are the means by which man thinks his own nature and the relation to the self as certain types of subjectivities — the way an individual experiences him or herself in

⁶⁴ Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 351.

⁶⁵ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 373.

⁶⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

⁶⁷ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995).

relation to truth.⁶⁸ The way we are constituted as moral subjects by our own actions and of our own knowledge, and the forms of understanding that the subject creates about him or herself.

Thinking in the space of disappeared man is to approach the present critically. Contemporary philosophical activity is thought bearing down on itself, working on itself towards thinking otherwise. Rather than seeking an affirmation of what we know, our task when confronting contemporary problems is to employ a thinking, employ philosophy as a critique of the present, that can “separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do or think.”⁶⁹ Such critique does not accumulate into a body of knowledge or a dogma but is rather an ethos, an approach, that sets the interrogation of the present and what we are in the present against limits that are imposed on forms of subjectivity and demands the possibility of going beyond them. Foucault recalls the essential and philosophical task as suggested by Merleau-Ponty: “Never consent to be completely comfortable with your own certainties. Never let them sleep, but never believe either that a new fact will be enough to reverse them.”⁷⁰ We must not seek to reaffirm certainties, but rather seek those moments when certainties are lost. We must seek those moments when our certainties are whisked away as so many mistakes we’ve made and clarities are obscured such that the uncertain, unexplored ground becomes the familiar in a way that gives ‘the most fragile instant roots.’ A crucial aspect of how Foucault configures his ‘disappeared man’ requires this understanding of seeking the uncertain and discomfort. One does not *lose* oneself, as Bataille or, in a different way, Blanchot assert — it is not a lack — rather one *becomes* desubjectivizing.

⁶⁸ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 6-7.

⁶⁹ Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” in *The Politics of Truth*, trans. Catherine Porter (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), 114.

⁷⁰ Michel Foucault, “For an Ethics of Discomfort,” in *The Politics of Truth*, trans. Lysa Hochroth (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), 127.

Let us veer again towards our concern with specific modes of aesthetics and what an aesthetic of existence means for Foucault. If it is not a categorical imperative, not the adherence to a universal code or senses of morality and conscience, but an active participation in self-styling by working on the self, what exactly does it entail? The active participation in self-styling and in experimentation with new forms of thinking and doing is a way of creating that do not refer to systems of judgment. The role of contemporary philosophical activity is to bear down on itself and to approach the present critically; this is not to say that we are solely interested in critique for itself, but only as it leads to thinking otherwise. Criticism as such, we can say in most regards, is an act of comparison. This violence is worse than that violence, video games are more violent than ever before, and so on. So often is such criticism repeated that it has become common sense, dogma that we tune out when we hear it. We register the sounds or the words on the page, but the comparison or critique is largely lost. One of the dominant traditions in the Western world of cultural criticism is to judge a work based on its truth-value. That is, the way it matches up to reality. Of course, while we have moved in various ways away from the strict guidelines imposed on us by Plato, much of contemporary criticism still relies on the call for the real over the denunciation of the false, and the world of simulacra. Criticism of a thing or an act that resides squarely within the boundaries of representation will, eventually, demand judgment of that thing or act.

The task, then, becomes responding to events or experiences without such judgment; without recourse to reproduced value and towards, rather, produced and created values. Deleuze tells us in "To Have Done with Judgment" that "judgment prevents the emergence of any new mode of existence. For the latter creates itself through its own forces, that is, through the forces it is able to harness, and is valid in and of itself inasmuch as it brings the new combination into

existence. Herein, perhaps, lies the secret: to bring into existence and not to judge.”⁷¹ If criticism, then, is about comparing, the need arises for a form of critical practices as comparisons that do not rely on this form of judging or judgment. If the problem with judgment is that it largely serves to reinforce the status quo and continually affirm the preexisting grounds of judgment — we can recall the normalizing judgments of *Discipline and Punish* and *The Use of Pleasure* — the demand is to act instead with a thinking that demands “a kind of criticism that would not try to judge.”⁷² Marco Abel adds to this by suggesting that judgment is not an exit from the plane of representation; instead, “judgment reproduces value based on a preexisting (moral) ground, thus perpetuating the same modes of existence rather than helping the new/difference to emerge.”⁷³ Instead of perpetually reinforcing a culture of judgment the goal is to prompt an investigation into how values function. It is precisely because of the inescapability of the realm of judgment, Abel tells us, that emphasis should be placed on the language, images, and forms of judgment we use and attention paid to the work that representation and judgment does.⁷⁴

The theater of representation (judgment) concerns itself with notions of truth-values and comparing the authentic with the inauthentic. The *authenticity* of a true work of art versus the *inauthenticity* of some paint-by-numbers or the authentic act of spontaneous, aimless, erotic love between partners contrasted with the staged, scripted, and goal oriented performance of the gigolo, for example.⁷⁵ The role of truth-values is to determine, ideally, the perfected form of representation. The ways in which, for example, the physical movements and touches of the gigolo match the movements and gestures of the lovers or how close moments and characters

⁷¹ Gilles Deleuze, “To Have Done with Judgment,” in *Gilles Deleuze: Essays Critical and Clinical* (New York: Verso, 1998), 135.

⁷² Michel Foucault, “The Masked Philosopher,” in *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy and Culture*, ed. Lawrence Kritzman (New York: Routledge, 1990), 326.

⁷³ Marco Abel, *Violent Affect: Literature, Cinema, and Critique After Representation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 34.

⁷⁴ Abel, *Violent Affect*, 214.

⁷⁵ I take this example from Bearn (2013).

from life are portrayed by the script. The problem then becomes discerning the real from representation. This approach, however, produces difficulties for itself: if we are to judge the authentic, we must outline criteria for what qualifies as authentic. What makes making love truly *making love*? What makes a friend truly a *friend*? The ready answer is that we only have to determine then follow the criteria for a given action to validate its authenticity. But the same movements, gestures, and articulations that would be laid out for an authentic action could just as easily be faked in an inauthentic action. How would we judge, for example, a real kiss from a fake kiss? Taking a lesson from Stanley Cavell, Bearn tells us that the criteria we seek makes faking possible: “There is no criteria for *being* a kiss over and above the criteria for being a *kiss*” which means that authentic action is defined by meeting criteria of that type of action, meaning that “it will be *scripted* by the criteria for being an instance of that sort of action.”⁷⁶ If we are looking for the criteria of an action that escapes the plane of representation and touches on the world, on life — that of authenticity — we are still defining criteria and so still very much involved in the world of representation. That is, in the trappings of a false authentic/inauthentic dichotomy. Authentic action is impossible. Judgment is not an exit.

An aesthetic of existence here resists criteria and, as a derivative, notions of perfection where perfection necessitates idealized criteria in the same manner as the authentic. The *perfect* morality relies on the *concept* of morality. The universal (Enlightenment). Similar to the argument for the impossibility of authentic action is the argument for the inadequacy of concepts (of a particular thing being fully characterized by its complete concept, and where the complete concept only characterizes one particular thing, and each thing only having one complete concept that defines it, and so on). We will discuss this at length in what follows, but it is important to acknowledge that Foucault’s aesthetics was not seeking something akin to perfection — Beauty,

⁷⁶ Bearn, *Life Drawing*, 112. Emphasis original.

the work of art, the Good — rather the ethics he pursued was something different. In creating ourselves as works of art, we must not think of ourselves in terms of authentic or inauthentic, we can't retreat to the woods to discover ourselves as if there was something underneath the rabble of society to 'discover'. Employing one's life as work of art does not mean ascribing your diet, your sexual habits, the ways in which you spend your time, and so on towards some notion of perfection conceived through some understanding, some knowledge or truth, about desire, nature, life, the body, and so on. Rather, our thinking should be to the contrary: "we should not have to refer the creative activity of somebody to the kind of relation he has to himself, but should relate the kind of relation one has to oneself to a creative activity."⁷⁷ And further, Foucault asserts "the search for a form of morality acceptable to everybody in the sense that everyone should submit to it, strikes me as catastrophic."⁷⁸

In "On the Genealogy of Ethics" Foucault elaborates on his aesthetics and on a mode of self-fashioning that moves away from a unitary conception of the subject and towards something more fragmented — towards 'not one immortal soul, but many mortal ones.' His concern was with self-styling, in a very Nietzschean bent, through the employment of technologies of the self rather than necessarily through any moral law or code of conscience. These self-practices consisted of four parts or considerations: the first consideration is that of ethical problematization of the self. Which parts of our self-constitutions need attention? Second, how are we to then deal with the problematized ethical content? Which mode of subjection and orientation are we to follow? The third aspect concerns techniques of the self — the actual work on does on one's self — that follows from any given modes of subjection. Lastly, we concern ourselves with an aesthetics of existence as the direction of our moral self-styling.

⁷⁷ Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics," 262.

⁷⁸ Michel Foucault, "The Return of Morality," in *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy and Culture*, ed. Lawrence Kritzman (New York: Routledge, 1990), 254.

Willfull hedonism? Mastering a Tyrannical Body

“Does it all come down to a question of how ... one ‘stylizes’ one’s conduct? What would a stylish rape look like, precisely?”⁷⁹

It is in the play of power relations, for Foucault, that individuals come to constitute a relation to themselves — where techniques of the self are formed and one comes to experience one’s self. The experience of the self comes into play in the process of appropriating or claiming certain truths, identifying with certain subjectivities. An individual constitutes a certain relation with him or herself, for example, when they express truths about what they think or do — being a criminal or being mad. Such truths — subjectivities — are always dependent on games of truth as they operate around the individual in local, discursive practices. Inherent in this practice of power relations, in all power relations for Foucault, is the relationship between power and freedom, or power and refusal. One can refuse a truth or subjectivity, instead pursuing a new form. The ability and capability for resistance is a condition for the exertion of power; without such abilities relations of power would not exist, only domination. For Foucault resistance is a freeness that opposes and allows for the practice of power: remember power for Foucault is the functioning of ‘conducting the conduct of others’ and directing their behavior and so an element of freedom is required — a certain form of liberty — and there is necessarily the possibility of resistance. Not dismissing existing states of domination or perpetually asymmetrical relations where liberty is extremely limited, Foucault responds to critiques that suggest that if power is everywhere then there is no liberty by asserting that “if there are relations of power throughout every social field it is because there is freedom everywhere.”⁸⁰ The struggle between powers and freedoms produces diverse possibilities in terms of relationships, modes of conduct, and possible

⁷⁹ Terry Eagleton, *Ideology of the Aesthetic* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 394.

⁸⁰ Foucault, “The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom,” 123. See also “The Subject and Power,” in Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982).

experiences of one's self of others. It is through the exercise of freedoms, through refusals of existing subjectivities and truths, resistance to the kind of individuality that has been imposed on us for centuries, that we can promote new forms of subjectivities.⁸¹ The experimentation with thought and action, modes of subjectivity, is not a work towards something like total freedom — such a well-defined thing does not exist. We can only change to the extent that we are free, Foucault tells us, and the work of thinking in the face of contemporary problems is thinking the limits of sociohistorical forms of subjectivities and the transformation of those limits.

The role of such freedom, then, is not insignificant for ethical matters. Ethics for Foucault is a matter of one's self-reflective implication in and dependence upon the myriad cultural forces in play but where there is, nevertheless, room for self-direction and autonomy. In "The Ethic of Care for the Self," Foucault tells us that individual liberty becomes ethical via the care of the self. Recalling that for the Greeks, parts of what were discerned as one's ethical life were problematized as the relationship between the exercise of freedom, the forms of his power, and access to truth such that an aesthetics of existence was developed as 'purposeful art of a freedom perceived as a power game'.⁸² Such games identified individual freedoms as the ability to care for oneself in a manner that contributed to the overall freedom and health of the polis: freedom for the Greeks didn't entail only the independence of the city as a whole, but also considered "the freedoms of individuals, understood as the mastery they were capable of exercising over themselves, [as] indispensable to the entire state."⁸³ Further, the "individual's attitude towards himself, the way in which he ensured his own freedom with regard to himself, and the form of supremacy he maintained over himself were a contributing element to the well being and good-

⁸¹ Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 216.

⁸² Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 253.

⁸³ Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 79.

order of the city.”⁸⁴ Such freedom, for the Greeks, was not to be understood in terms of a free will or the reckless pursuit of one’s desires, but rather as an enslavement, “the enslavement of the self by oneself. To be free in relation to pleasures was to be free of their authority” — freedom was “a power that one brought to bear on oneself in the power that one exercised over others.”⁸⁵

Freedom as power games, then, concerns one’s ability to direct one’s self in an aesthetic manner — self-imposed acts exerted over the body. The struggle of this kind, Foucault tells us, requires training; more specifically, requires active bodies engaged in the *askesis* of ethical training. Foucault’s use of the Greek *askesis*, as part of the struggle to create an ethically engaged art of living, differs critically from its downstream adaptation in Christian notions of asceticism in at least important two ways: First, Christian asceticism is aimed at the renunciation of the self whereas the moral *askesis* of the Greeks had as its goal the establishment of a specific relationship to oneself; and second, Christian asceticism is based on renunciation of the material world whereas the Greeks were concerned with a moral preparation and equipping oneself with the tools needed to confront the world in an ethical and rational manner. Rather than a denial of the self and a material existence in the exercise of God’s will, *askesis* for the Greeks had a “very broad sense of denoting any kind of practical training or exercise” such that “this *techne tou biou*, this art of living, demands practice and training: *askesis*.”⁸⁶ Foucault’s body directedness stems in part from his understanding of Nietzsche, where history is not inscribed in the subject or on man but the body “and everything that touches it: diet, climate, and soil — is the domain of the *Herkunft*.”⁸⁷ The body manifests the stigmata of past experience and also gives rise to

⁸⁴ Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 79.

⁸⁵ Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 79-80.

⁸⁶ Michel Foucault, *Discourse and Truth: the Problematization of Parrhesia*, ed. Joseph Pearson, permanent URL: <http://foucault.info/documents/parrhesia/>, 62.

⁸⁷ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *The Essential Works Of Michel Foucault Vol. 2, Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1998), 375.

desires, failings, and errors. “These elements may join in a body where they achieve a sudden expression, but just as often, their encounter is an engagement in which they efface each other, and pursue their insurmountable conflict.”⁸⁸ Foucault, then, placed freedom within a historically situated rationality and contingent practices of power and is not defined by external constraints.

Bringing a critique from a different perspective, Terry Eagleton offers a dialectical understanding of the aesthetic as “a vision of human energies as radical ends in themselves,”⁸⁹ whose pervasiveness in society “found its grotesque apotheosis for a brief moment in fascism, with its panoply of myths, symbols, and orgiastic spectacles.”⁹⁰ Sharing a concern for the ties between aesthetics and fascism and maintaining the amoral, apolitical nature of the aesthetic, Eagleton tells us “aesthetics is born in the mid-eighteenth century as a discourse of the body” that concerns itself with “all that which follows from our sensuous relation to the world” in the ways that “reality strikes the body on its sensory surface.”⁹¹ Aesthetics, for Eagleton, marks the means through which structures of power become adapted as structures of feeling; to allow aesthetics to bleed over into the political and ethical realms would be to allow the amalgamation of beauty and violence.⁹² Moreover, any slippage of the aesthetic sphere in to the others could only result in the total subsumption of all under the aesthetic realm, where everything becomes a matter of aesthetics and, most importantly for our work here, “morality is converted to a matter of style.”⁹³

For critics like Eagleton the dilemmas — the violences — posed by lived experiences shaped under the forces of capitalism, the commodification of identities and desires, are

⁸⁸ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 375.

⁸⁹ Terry Eagleton, *Ideology of the Aesthetic*, 9.

⁹⁰ Terry Eagleton, *Ideology of the Aesthetic*, 372.

⁹¹ Terry Eagleton, “Aesthetics and the Politics in Edmund Burke,” *History Workshop*, 28 (Autumn, 1989), 53.

⁹² See Eagleton, *Ideology of the Aesthetic*, 26.

⁹³ Eagleton, *Ideology of the Aesthetic*, 368.

themselves the results of an aestheticized political realm. Seeing the post-war years as aestheticized by a ‘fetishism of style and surface’ and a ‘culture of hedonism and technique’, Eagleton is among many critics of Foucault’s work who seem too ready to dismiss him to the wasteland of ‘individualism’ when they break with their narrowly defined structures. Eagleton accuses Foucault of something nearing utopian idealism or, at any rate, with escapism and fantasy; seeking at the same time to become, on one hand, emancipated from social institutions of truth and meaning and, on the other, asserting that due to a microphysics of power we can never escape such institutions. Let us recall, however, that the aim of Foucault’s aesthetics of existence is to self-fashion to the extent possible within systems of social constraints: practices of the self are not something completely spontaneous that individuals invent themselves but are, rather, “patterns that [one] finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested and imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group.”⁹⁴

The potential and possibility of ethics for Foucault comes precisely from the culture and society that one is enmeshed in, and the formation of one’s relation to the self in the relation to others. He saw a uniform code, a categorical imperative, as catastrophic in terms of fostering potentiality — a critique also shared by many of those contesting his ethics as aesthetics. When Eagleton criticizes “Foucault’s vigorously self-mastering individual” as wholly monadic, where society consists of an “assemblage of autonomous self-disciplining agents, with no sense that their self-realization might flourish within bonds of mutuality,”⁹⁵ perhaps it is because, as Jane Bennett suggests, he (along with other critics) prefer the dangers associated with a command morality as opposed to what she terms Foucault’s ethics of reflective heteronomy. One such danger, she tells us, is a hedonism that stems from the threat of autonomy, read as an ethics not

⁹⁴ Foucault, “The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom,” 122.

⁹⁵ Eagleton, *Ideology of the Aesthetic*, 393.

governed by Reason, but by the body and its pleasures. She notes Wolin's fear of the tyrannical body in his defense of neo-Kantian style ethics where Foucault's ethics 'gushes' a 'morally suspect vitalism' and also points to other critics who assert Foucauldian ethics strip subjects of moral responsibility. Such critiques ultimately reduce Foucault's project to 'an unreflective submission to the body' where his aesthetics is denied its vital *ascetic* dynamic.⁹⁶ An ascetic dynamic that was the moral preparation and equipping for the care of the self that was not a self-indulgence or a disregard for others but instead the necessary condition for effective engagement with others.

⁹⁶ Bennett, "How Is It, Then, That We Still Remain Barbarians?" 662.

CHAPTER EIGHT: Is the Shield a Weapon?: Dialectical Resistance and the Gaze of Redemption

A central paradox of any transformative criticism is that its dreams for the future are founded on a history of suffering, stigma, and violence. Oppositional criticism opposes not only existing structures of power but also the very history that gives it meaning. Insofar as the losses of the past motivate us and give meaning to our current experience, we are bound to memorialize them (“We will never forget”). But we are equally bound to overcome the past, to escape its legacy (“We will never go back”).

— Heather Love, *Feeling Backward*¹

They say you die twice. One time when you stop breathing and a second time, a bit later on, when somebody says your name for the last time.

— Banksy, “Banksy in his own words”²

Foucauldian autonomy is not geared towards the achievement of a personal moral transcendence obtained at the expense of society but, rather, the refusal to submit to the ‘government of individualization’ by constantly questioning what seems to be natural in one’s own identity and by the ceaseless interrogation of the limits that the present asserts as necessary. This is, of course, Foucault’s read on the Enlightenment itself, with Kant as a leading example: the Enlightenment project, as Foucault conceives it, is not blind adherence to universalisms, Rational truths, or a dogmatic faith to be discovered but is instead “the permanent reactivation of an attitude — that is, of a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era.”³ Such critique is always historically situated and not an ahistorical transcendence. “The historical ontology of ourselves must turn away from all projects that claim to be global or radical,” he tells us, because experience has shown us that claims made “to escape from the system of contemporary reality so as to produce the overall programs of another

¹ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 1.

² Banksy quoted in Nick Francis, “Banksy in His Own Words,” *The Sun*, September 4, 2010, www.thesun.co.uk/.

³ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” in *The Essential Works Of Michel Foucault Vol. 1, Ethics*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997), 312.

society, of another way of thinking, another culture, another vision of the world, has led only to the return of the most dangerous traditions.”⁴

Since Kant, philosophy has taken on the task of critical thinking as a major concern where philosophical activity comes to mean the work that thought bears on itself in attempts not to reaffirm what one already knows, but instead to the possibilities of thinking differently. Ethics for Foucault is not only an interrogation of the self, but an interrogation of postmodern thought; that is, thought in the wake of the death of man and the absence of universal moral judgment. Philosophy today, consisting of the possibility of thinking otherwise, is “entitled to explore what might be changed, in its own thought, through the practice of a knowledge that is foreign to it.”⁵ Ethical engagement is a perpetual process of self-interrogation aimed at the disruption of what is known with something that is foreign to it where the work being done by ethics is the taking of the self — the familiarity of one’s own identity and the intimacy of self-understanding — and disrupting it. Refusing it. Getting free of oneself.

Ethics for Foucault is irreducible to notions of identity or of moral and legal law. He attempts to separate the ethical self from such notions by positing a certain type of relationship between aesthetics and experience, where aesthetic experience itself, rather than one being in conformity with a certain behavioral code, is what allows for forms of ethical self-interrogation. The experiences of certain relationships to truth, constitutive of the modern subject, Foucault argues, “did not lead to a hermeneutics of desire, it did on the other hand open into an aesthetics of existence” that “took on the brilliance of beauty that was revealed to those able to behold it.”⁶ In the well-known argument from the first installment of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault’s ‘political economy’ of the obligation to speak the truth about sex interrogates the relationship

⁴ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” 316.

⁵ Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 9.

⁶ Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 89.

between a hermeneutics of desire and forms of power relations. One major effect of the play between the two is its transformative power. Discussing homosexuality, he asserts that such transformative power has been leveled on sexual acts themselves, where what is permitted and what is restricted is made into one's sexual identity. Here he details the transformation of juridical subjectivities and adherence to moral codes into an identity for hermeneutic subjects. In the juridical model, work on the self is aimed at repetition and citation of the law, which constituted the identity of the laws themselves. It is the forms of techniques of the self that pre-exist such codification as law or identity that Foucault examines in *The Use of Pleasures*. We can locate Foucault's call to reorient ethical performativity (techniques of the self) away from the juridical model and towards the aesthetic in his demands for creativity after the disruption of self; after one loses oneself. Such disruptions and refusals contest the repetition of prior laws and focus instead on practices of becoming, of self-styling as self-invention. When one does not accept oneself as one is, ethics becomes about the transformation of existence and not the citation of a moral law.

The 'possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do or think' Foucault sees as the work of freedom but, importantly, of an *undefined* freedom that does not suggest a total revolution or the exchange of one totalizing unity for another. Remember that for Foucault, the experimentation with thought and action — with modes of subjectivity — is not a movement towards something like total freedom because such a well-defined thing does not exist. We can only change to the extent that we are free, Foucault tells us, and the work of thinking in the face of contemporary problems is thinking the limits of sociohistorical forms of subjectivities and the transformation of those limits. The work of askesis – of technologies of the self – are focused on transformation at these limits. Importantly, much like freedom itself, the work one does on one's

self is an undefined project that is never finished: askesis is “the work that one performs on oneself in order to transform oneself or make the self appear which, happily, one never attains ... it’s up to us to advance into a homosexual ascesis that would make us work on ourselves and invent — I do not say discover — a manner of being that is still improbable.”⁷ The inventive, creating subject takes an active role in their critique of the present and to the ever-changing power games.

An active, critical, and experimental attitude is required in the pursuit of an aesthetics of existence where one confronts oneself in terms of what they are — of what they are thinking and doing. While an ethics as askesis is a perpetual demand placed upon us by the contemporary lack (rejection, inadequacy, and so on) of fixed rules and programs defined by universals, the most important aspect of askesis is the critical engagement of potentialities. “The elaboration of one’s own life as a personal work of art,” Foucault asserts, “*even if it obeyed certain collective canons*, was at the centre, it seems to me, of moral experience, of the will to morality in Antiquity.”⁸ Existence as askesis allows us to detach ourselves from ourselves and from our presuppositions in a critical fashion that compels us towards experimentation with thought, relationships, and forms of living that, in its more radical forms, can free oneself from one’s self as an experience experiment with a non-identity (anonymity) or desubjectification. Foucault is not claiming that everything is necessarily bad, but “that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism.”⁹

⁷ Michel Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life,” in *The Essential Works Of Michel Foucault Vol. 1, Ethics*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997), 137.

⁸ Foucault, “An Aesthetics of Existence,” 49. Emphasis mine.

⁹ Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics,” 256.

Such activism is a vigilance in the relationship with the self that calls the primacy of the subject — that is, calls the self — into question that Foucault finds in his readings of Nietzsche, Bataille, and Blanchot. Such work on the self cannot be limited to thought alone, to the realm of speculation, but must be taken in the form of concrete experiences where “calling the subject in question meant that one would have to experience something leading to its actual destruction, its decomposition, its explosion, its conversion into something else.”¹⁰ This experience, Foucault explains, “has the function of wrenching the subject from itself, of seeing to it that the subject is no longer itself, or that it is brought to its annihilation or its dissolution. This is a project of desubjectivation.”¹¹ Foucault sees these limit-experiences of a subject trying to break free of itself in his own work, in his own books, for example, where he has “always conceived of them as direct experiences aimed at pulling myself free of myself, at preventing me from being the same.”¹² Writing in order to change oneself and not think the same as before.

In his problematization of the present, Foucault sought to transgress the limits of contemporary experience as historically constituted modes of subjectivity. Such transgression required a critical approach towards identifying limits generally and those limits that can be crossed. Foucault construes the self “as an object of a complex and difficult elaboration”¹³ and technologies of the self as the means through which humans effect “a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conducts, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.”¹⁴ In other words, a critical mind towards limit-experiences is a way we relate to

¹⁰ “Interview With Michel Foucault,” conducted by D. Trombadori (1978), in *The Essential Works Of Michel Foucault Vol. 3, Power*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 2001), 247.

¹¹ “Interview With Michel Foucault,” 241.

¹² “Interview With Michel Foucault,” 242.

¹³ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” 311.

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, & Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 18.

our actuality and the choices we make with regard to thinking, feeling, and acting. It is through Nietzsche's 'becoming what we are' and notions of creating ourselves that Foucault sees the ways in which we are to cross the limits imposed on us by the roles outlined by subjectivities. He takes from Nietzsche a targeting approach to stylizing aspects of one's life (determining which parts of one's life are of ethical concern) towards open-ended and undefined subjectivities. It is this targeting approach of giving style to one's life that allows us to speak of an aesthetic of existence because it compels the individual "to adopt an active attitude of opposition and resistance to uniformizing and disciplining tendencies and to develop new subjectivities."¹⁵

In this important way Foucault distinguishes himself from Bataille: Bataille seeks a subject that loses the self and gains nothing, a subjectivity as the anguish-riddled loss of self that focuses on 'the inner experience' of living on in the world of post-Nietzschean mysticism. Foucault, on the other hand, while speaking of losing oneself and 'straying afield of oneself', was concerned with subjectivities of *becoming* — a process of affirmation rather than a process as lack. It is the creative action of self-styling that we are to focus on and not the identities that we move through in the process. It is the *creative* force that does work on limitations imposed by relations of power and not only the particular identities on which we land or pass through. The creative process of becoming is a primary source of the 'go-to' criticism leveled at Foucauldian critiques and at Foucault himself, mainly that he — and downstream scholarship — fails to offer adequate normative criteria for the articulation of specific techniques and strategies to resist normalizing processes and towards transformation of the social and the self. Many tie this in with what some have perceived as Foucault's lack of political activism in his later years and works, choosing instead to prattle on about seemingly trivial aspects of ancient Greek dietary regimes,

¹⁵ Marli Huijter, "The aesthetics of existence in the work of Michel Foucault," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 25 (1999): 71.

and other narcissistic concerns of the self. We can, of course, see how such critiques miss the point Foucault was making entirely.¹⁶

When he talks of regimentation, Foucault notes the potential dangers inherent in all regimes — dietary, sexual, physical and/or mental exercise, and anything else. If the aim of regimen, he tells us, “was to prevent excesses, one might exaggerate the importance one lent to it and the autonomy one permitted it to assume” to such an extent that the specific techniques of a regime come to replace the importance and purpose of the diet (or whatever) itself: “the purpose of diet was not to extend life as far as possible in time nor as high as possible in performance, but rather to make it useful and happy within the limits that had been set for it;” further, “a regimen was not good if it only permitted one to live in one place, with one type of food, and if it did not allow one to be open to any change. The usefulness of a regimen lay precisely in the possibility it gave individuals to face different situations.”¹⁷ When Foucault is discussing the ancient examples of diet and regime in *The Use of Pleasure* his point is to emphasize that, for the Greeks, regimen was not understood as a set of uniform rules but was more like “a manual for reacting to situations in which one might find oneself, a treatise for adjusting one’s behavior to fit the circumstances.”¹⁸ He is not referring to the more passive manuals and instructional self-help books we are familiar with today, but rather with a diary of sorts (*hupomnemata*) that is meant to be engaged — not a pamphlet to be read, but a treatise to be written. He goes on to say, referencing Socrates, that “to become an art of existence, good management of the body ought to include a setting down in writing carried out by the subject concerning himself; with the help of

¹⁶ Foucault leaves himself open to such critiques, but for reasons entirely consistent with his philosophy: “The role of the intellectual is not to tell others what they must do. By what right would he do so? And remember all the prophecies, promises, injunctions and programs that intellectuals have managed to formulate over the last two centuries and whose effects we can now see.” Found in Michel Foucault, “The Concern for Truth,” in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and other Writings 1977-1984*, edited by Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Routledge, 1990), 265.

¹⁷ Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 104-5.

¹⁸ Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 106.

this note-taking, the individual would be able to gain his independence and choose judiciously between what was good and bad for him.”¹⁹

Foucault’s ethics, as we have seen, is concerned not with adherence to moral codes but on the many relations one has with oneself and the techniques, strategies, and exercises that one employs in in those relationships whereby one makes themselves an object to be known, and thus enabled to be transformed. It is the advancement of this self-oriented ethics that Foucault’s critics say demonstrates his turn from politics and political activism towards narcissistic self-indulgence.²⁰ In the “On the Genealogy of Ethics” interview Foucault was asked “but isn’t the Greek concern with the self just an early version of our self-absorption, which many consider a central problem in our society?” to which Foucault responds

...there was a practice of the self, a conception of the self, very different from our present culture of the self. In the Californian cult of the self, one is supposed to deliver one’s true self, to separate it from that which might obscure or alienate it, to decipher its truth thanks to psychological or psychoanalytical science, which is supposed to be able to tell you what your true self is. Therefore, not only do I not identify this ancient culture of the self with what you might call the Californian cult of the self, I think they are diametrically opposed.²¹

Recall our discussion earlier about Foucault’s distinction between askesis and asceticism as well as the ancient understandings of one’s relationship to community versus modern conceptions of individualism that allow for specific notions of self-absorption. It is through askesis rather than the inherited Christian concept of asceticism, he tells us, that one does not renounce the self but instead fosters a relationship of self-sovereignty with one’s self that serves to prepare an individual for social and ethical engagement with the world, rather than a withdrawal from it. The inherited Christian moral tradition of self-renunciation as the condition for salvation makes it difficult for the modern Western world to see taking care of the self and

¹⁹ Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 108.

²⁰ See discussion in Chapter 7. Particularly the section titled “Kant, the Greeks, and the Autonomy of the Aesthetic.”

²¹ Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics,” 271.

the idea that we should give more care to ourselves than to anything else as anything other than immoral.²²

Returning to the critics' concern: Foucault's lack of normative criteria for the articulation of specific techniques and strategies to resist normalizing processes and towards transformation of the social and the self. Foucault's concern, as demonstrated here with his comments on "Californian" techniques of the self, are with forms of self-creation that are not reliant on notions of authenticity — that is, on ideas of essentialism, codes, universals, and so on. One's true self cannot be delivered because no true self exists, as the contemporary popular (and psychological or psychoanalytical) understanding would have us believe. Foucault's understanding of caring for the self also, then, conflicts with contemporary understandings (and accusations) of narcissism and self-absorption. Foucault does not outline specific practices or techniques of the contemporary self because he could only do so from an individual's art of existence — that is, each individual would require their own set of practices and strategies to be outlined according to their regimen and ethical engagement. As Timothy O'Leary puts it, "the only work which could 'really' show the value of Foucault's ethics would be one which was a testament to an individual's attempt to live in accordance with it."²³ As Foucault himself puts it in "For an Ethic of Discomfort:" "Everyone has their own way of changing, or, what amounts to the same thing, of perceiving that everything changes. In this matter, nothing is more arrogant than to try to dictate to others. My way of being no longer the same is, by definition, the most singular part of what I am."²⁴

²² Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in *The Essential Works Of Michel Foucault Vol. 1, Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), 228.

²³ Timothy O'Leary, *Foucault and the Art of Ethics* (London: Continuum, 2002), 174.

²⁴ Michel Foucault, "For an Ethic of Discomfort," in *The Essential Works Of Michel Foucault Vol. 3, Power*, ed. James Faubion (New York: New Press, 2001), 444.

While it is not my goal to rescue Foucault's aesthetics from any and all criticism — as if that were possible — it is my intention to demonstrate some of the strengths of his ethics, while engaging the weaknesses, and employing them in attempts to move forward towards an affirming, creative political theory and praxis, especially as it concerns contemporary practices of violence. We can draw on Foucault's creative self-styling and his problematizations of social and individual causal relations in our search for a means to move beyond understandings of violence as it informs structures of domination. Perhaps most valuable in this regard is the understanding of power as productive: that is, while violence operates in certain capacities at different levels, one of its major operations at all levels is that *it does something for someone*. Violence is exercised in the active formation and self-fashioning of individuals (and groups) such that they experience it as a positive step — an action undertaken towards the formation of certain identities and power relationships. At the same time, however, such processes of self-styling, if we were to undertake a Foucauldian ontology of the self, could become a point of resistance and a movement towards alternative lifestyles. In this regard, taking hold of this deliberate cultivation of the self, of giving style to one's life, becomes of crucial significance.

An aesthetics of self that emphasizes the individual character of self-fashioning provides another major advantage in what Anita Seppa refers to as aesthetic pluralism. Aesthetic pluralism “pluralizes aesthetic resistance and individual ‘stylistics’” so as to open spaces that consider the positive benefits of differences, rather than seeing them as antagonistic.²⁵ Such an offering, Seppa argues, has important implications for new visions of feminist politics where “female subjectivity and the self are understood as sites of political contestation and individual acts, which might create space for multiple transgressive practices of ‘womanhood’ and hence support

²⁵ Anita Seppa, “Foucault, Enlightenment and the Aesthetics of the Self,” *Contemporary Aesthetics* 2 (2004), permanent URL: <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.7523862.0002.004>.

new models of living and alternative forms of subjection.”²⁶ Subjectivity, then, becomes the site of active contestation of the processes of normalization, where the self is aesthetically performed through the body and is oriented around the demand for creativity and the (re)creation of the self.

Such subjectivation — the active self-creating taken on by individuals — is motivated in part by the problematization of existence, the self-interruptions, and the self-estrangements that Foucault associated with the Greek ethos of self-relation. More specifically, it is a way of relating to the present, ways of acting and behaving, that places one in a relationship with contemporary reality in a manner that transformed the concept of ethos into an experimental attitude. Problematizing the present through an ethos that critically seeks the limits of experience under contemporary regimes and practices ascribes such an experimental attitude with the task of inventing and creating oneself. For Foucault, the potential to transgress historical conditions of experience goes beyond a critique of current regimes of truth and their respective technologies and into a reformulation of modes of critique themselves. At the limits, he tells us, we have to be doing more than mere critique: “we have to transform the [Kantian] critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression,”²⁷ transforming the process of critique itself into an experimental ethos. Foucault tells us that the critical ontology of ourselves “has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.”²⁸ The task at hand is to problematize principles of judgment themselves, to critique contemporary technologies that are used as judgment rather than as subject to judgment.

²⁶ Seppa, “Foucault, Enlightenment and the Aesthetics of the Self.”

²⁷ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” 315.

²⁸ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” 319.

Immanent Resistance: Total Destruction and Absolute Creation

Yet God knows that there are ideological traffic police around, and we can hear their whistles blast: go left, go right, here, later, get moving, not now ... The insistence on identity and the injunction to make a break both feel like impositions, and in the same way.
— Foucault, “For an Ethic of Discomfort,”²⁹

Continuing the discussion from Chapter Two on Wittgenstein and aspectival captivity, I turn here to a second ‘picture’ that warrants our attention. As a reminder, a ‘picture’ functions as the implicit background of our social practices or as the openly acknowledged limit of what is deemed universal and necessary. Such pictures are deep rooted in our unquestioned assumptions about the modern world and make it difficult to question or even identify the pictures as such. For Wittgenstein the first task is to make pictures visible as pictures so they can be shown in their contingency; a task made difficult in that language is, for Wittgenstein, the source of pictures. Attempts to resist certain pictures or practices found therein can unintentionally apply the same language and grammar and only serve to reinforce or maintain the object of critique.

A second picture I seek to challenge is one that understands performativity and resistance (i.e. individualization, autonomy, and so on) as stemming from a juridical model, where moral law consists of reiterative practices understood as citations of law. Such a picture has pervasive implications for our employment of violences and for our ability to seek alternatives to and resist such practices. To open up this picture, I will contrast Butler and Foucault, highlighting their respective understandings of power and the ways in which it informs a politics of resistance. Importantly, I will emphasize the differences between Butler’s modified dialectical resistance with Foucault’s nondialectical, immanent forms of resistance as becoming.

This picture supports and is supported by an adherence to variations of Hegelian dialectics and corresponding notions of negation and opposition that, on one level, facilitate a

²⁹ Michel Foucault, “For an Ethic of Discomfort,” 444.

politics of binaries (us/them, soldier/terrorist, good/evil, and so on) but also, insofar as we are unable to break with such dialectics, a more sophisticated politics of resistance through the championing of the abject. Captivation by this picture, by this way of thinking, is tied conceptually with notions of the inner and the outer discussed previously in Chapter 2 and with normalizing technologies geared at defining certain identities. These identities are constructed, in part, by ideas of mourning and violence that perpetuate (because they are necessitated by) a dialectics of compulsory exclusion and opposition that serve to marginalize and qualify practices of violence, as well as conceal their normalizing effects.

My interest here is with the formation of identities — subjectivities — as reiterations of moral laws pertaining to mourning and memory. The ways that mourning serves to maintain those we mourn — concretizing their identity and their status through memorialization, through the ‘final words’ of eulogy spoken by those who ‘knew them best’. Contemporary practices of mourning and memorialization rely on the necessity of preservation, on determining once and for — as if a final declaration — the identity of the person, place, or thing being committed to memory. In turn, such technologies allow for self-definition and identification via the dialectical relation to those we mourn. We have certain practices of mourning that allow us to ‘never forget’, tethering our politics to a memory and a way of thinking about ourselves that perpetuate and conceal the contingent technologies of oppressive power relations. Rather than the acts performed by an individual being subsumed by universal laws, I seek a way of moving past the championing of a negated abject and employing such acts to a certain stylization based on a singularity, despite its contingent and derivative qualities. In what follows I pursue two main interests: 1) the possibility of a radical destruction that frees us from the reiterative understandings (and pitfalls) of the juridical model; that is, the possibility of a break from the

law and Hegelian dialectic; and 2) what a politics of resistance might look like with a radical negation of the juridical model that allows for autonomous creation and becoming.

Many those seeking antinormative practices attempt to work from within Hegel's dialectics: Judith Butler, as one very popular example, writes in her *Subjects of Desire* that "references to a 'break' with Hegel are almost always impossible, if only because Hegel has made the very notion of 'breaking with' a central tenet of his dialectic."³⁰ Butler here, along with David Halperin and other antinormative thinkers, locate Foucault within the Hegelian tradition at least insofar as he is concerned with the subject of desire. It is important to note that both Halperin's and Butler's theories of resistance don't take Foucault's attention to immanence and nondialectical resistance into account—without doubt an unavoidable scenario in that much of Foucault's interest with immanence was largely published after the publication of their highly important work and from his more recently published lectures at the *Collège de France*. In order to elaborate Foucault's strategy of immanence, I think it would be useful to contrast his nondialectical thinking with Butler's modified Hegelianism. In particular, I would like to discuss her politics of resistance as the resignification of the abject, of the negated values of a dialectic (i.e. heterosexual/homosexual, male/female, and so on).

As a generalized starting point, the conflation of the juridical and the hermeneutic subject is the topic of Judith Butler's influential work on the discursive and performative influences on gender. For Butler gender — and the self — is produced through cultural and aesthetic performances consisting of acts and gestures, motions and desires that are the manifestations of the self on the physical body. The self is aesthetically performed through the body and body language, suggesting a way out of the hermeneutics of desire, where sexual identity as

³⁰ Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 183-4.

performative effect is the effect of discursive practices (power relations) and not something predating the adoption of a language. Aesthetic performances for Butler are not determined by any one act as determined in response to an external law or code, but through repetition and the reiterations of norms. In *Gender Trouble* she tells us that, in a sense, “all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; ‘agency,’ then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition. If the rules governing signification not only restrict, but enable the assertion of alternative domains of cultural intelligibility, i.e., new possibilities for gender that contest the rigid codes of hierarchical binarisms, then it is only *within* the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible.”³¹ The law does not have a stable form to act as a point of reference for guiding behavior but, rather, is produced itself by the repetition of acts over time. In *Bodies that Matter* Butler tells us “the law is no longer given in a fixed form, but is produced through citation as that which precedes and exceeds the mortal approximations enacted by the subject.”³² It is the repetition of aesthetic performances understood as the citation of a law that allows performativity to be a contestation of both the meaning of the act and the law itself.

Butler’s arguments come, in part, from her interaction with a Derridian understanding of performative speech and a Foucauldian theory of power, where utterances are enmeshed with structures of power (discursive practices) and serve to define identities. In understanding performativity as “that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains,”³³ where “identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results,”³⁴ identities can be interrogated as the performance of certain linguistic and

³¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 198-9, emphasis original.

³² Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 14.

³³ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 2.

³⁴ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 34.

embodied practices. Derrida dissolves the distinction between speech act and context by asserting the distinctive effect a speech act has on any particular situation, whereby the effects of a speech act are part of the act itself. In this way, speech acts in the form of discursive practices inevitably change the contextual situation of a discourse in a manner that renders pointless the emphasis placed on contextual clues by traditional speech act theory. Speech acts, for Derrida, operate the same as written words in that it delivers “a force that breaks with its context, that is, with the collectivity of presences organizing the moment of its inscription. This breaking force (*force de rupture*) is not an accidental predicate but the very structure of the written text.”³⁵ Contra such notions asserted by Searle, Austin, and so on, for Derrida it is because of the possibility of repetition, of iterability, that the intent of an individual speaker can never be fully accounted for and the weight of performative speech acts comes not from context or intent, but from the structure of language itself.

As Butler reminds us in *Excitable Speech*, “for Derrida, the force of the performative is derived precisely from its decontextualization, from its break with a prior context and its capacity to assume new contexts.”³⁶ The very repetition of performativity that allows for the construction of a convention, in fact, is based on the premise that a performance will continue to work in successive contexts, though no context in particular such that any contextualized performance is openly subjected to further contextualization. The logic of iterability is enacted by the productive force of a speech act in breaking with its prior context. Derrida identifies this performative force as a structural feature of any sign existing outside of any social context, such that the ‘force’ “must break with its prior contexts in order to maintain its iterability as a sign. The force of the performative is thus not inherited from prior usage, but issues forth precisely

³⁵ Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” in *Limited Inc* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 9.

³⁶ Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 147.

from its break with any and all prior usage. That break, that force of rupture, is the force of the performative, beyond all questions of truth or meaning.”³⁷ Similarly, Butler is concerned with the ways in which subjects are constructed insofar as the possibility of speech is predetermined through the adoption and employment of language. The room for agency is found in that language and discursive regimes are continuously redefined through practice. It is in this space that she finds the ability to act/be/perform otherwise and escape the confines of contemporary discourse.

Butler’s critique responds to the juridical model of morality from within the framework of a Hegelian subject of desire. As an alternative to this model, I suggest the Foucauldian model of ethics as an aesthetics of existence, where emphasis is placed not on one’s relation to a law, but on practices of the self oriented towards forming one’s self as an ethical subject. So how do such practices differ? What comes from a disjunction and estrangement from the law and practices of the self, rather than a mutual reinforcement of both? Does moral law, as Butler insists, exist only as a reiterative performativity, only as practices of the self aimed at the citation of laws themselves? As Ewa Plonowska Ziarek points out, under the juridical model the very identity of the law is constituted by practices of the self aimed at the repetition of a norm, where the ethical subject refers to a law for his conduct with punishment the price for a transgression. In ethics oriented endeavors such as Foucault’s, on the other hand, practices of the self become less concerned with the citation of universal law and more transformation of one’s existence: “No longer aiming at the continuous reproduction of the past assured by the repetition of the law, these practices are preoccupied instead with the dilemmas of becoming inherent in the project of

³⁷ Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 148.

self-invention.”³⁸ These self-transformations for Foucault are not, as we have seen, the exercise of a liberal autonomy or individualism, a negative freedom, but rather “it implies a unique contextualization of action, a singular adjustment to and negotiation with variable circumstances” where “in place of the subsumption of particular acts under the universal law...[performative acts] ...are submitted to ‘complex stylization of existence’.”³⁹

To elaborate more on Foucault’s attempt to align performativity with the aesthetic rather than the juridical model, it will be useful to turn to Tom Roach’s explication of Foucauldian friendship and the ontological differences between the two models (aesthetic and juridical) as teased out through Butler and Foucault. In his *Friendship as a Way of Life*, Roach builds upon Foucault’s method of biopolitical resistance in efforts of employing friendship as a shared estrangement towards moving beyond historically determined identities in ways of thinking and relating otherwise. Here, where betrayal “instigates an ethical relation that cares little for historically determined identity,” “the friend’s role is actively to enhance the other’s potential, to push the friend to become-other.”⁴⁰ Highlighting the emphasis Foucault places on the role of subjection and subjectivation, Roach points to subjectivation as a means of revealing alternative organizations of power relations in ways that valorize the productive nature of power and the ways in which it can facilitate becoming otherwise. He demonstrates that the self, for Foucault, is not simply a product of reflexive relations constituted by negations, outsides, and so on that form the core of dialectical ontologies but is something more akin to the fluidity and contingency that Foucault asserts as the nature of power itself — something other than the dichotomous and

³⁸ Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, “‘Straying Afield of Oneself’: The Risks and Excesses of Foucault’s Ethics,” *Symplokē* 3 (1995): 186.

³⁹ Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, “‘Straying Afield of Oneself,” 188.

⁴⁰ Tom Roach, *Friendship as a Way of Life: Foucault, AIDS, and the Politics of Shared Estrangement* (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 2012), 9. Roach’s analysis that I employ here comes in large part from Chapter 3, “Ontology Matters.”

dialectical notions of sovereign power as repression and liberation. Let's turn, then, to a deeper analysis of the juridical and the aesthetic models and understandings of negations and becoming, in particular.

Butler builds on Hegel's concept of negation, the famous dictum based on dichotomous relations between Self and Other, identity and difference, where importantly, in the thesis-antithesis-synthesis dialectic, that which has been superseded is always maintained and preserved. For Hegel, negation plays a critical role in the determination of the subject, negation being the driving force for the production of identity. Importantly, negation for Hegel can only ever be a *determinate* negation and never absolute; that is, negation serves only as a productive measure from which something else will arise.⁴¹ Butler, as Roach points out, employs a version of this understanding of negation, championing the negated terms of the dialectic — the Other and difference. She resignifies Hegel's ontology so as to “explore the bind of subjectivity that is always-already gendered and sexed.”⁴² Contemporary identity, for Butler, is constituted by processes of exclusion and negation, where the negated term is never fully left behind or done away with, but is rather held tethered to the developed subject for its continued citation and reiteration — its continued abjection — as part of the law that allows its emergence. Butler: “The forming of a subject requires an identification with the normative phantasm of ‘sex,’ and this identification takes place through a repudiation which produces a domain of abjection, a repudiation without which the subject cannot emerge.”⁴³

It is through these reiterative practices as law defining that Butler finds her subversive strategy. Where “a citation will be at once an interpretation of the norm and an occasion to

⁴¹ See G.W.F Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 50-51.

⁴² Roach, *Friendship as a Way of Life*, 66.

⁴³ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 3.

expose the norm itself as a privileged interpretation,”⁴⁴ Butler sees the opportunity for the resignification of the dialectical terms. “Since the law must be repeated to remain an authoritative law,” she tells us, “the law perpetually reinstitutes the possibility of its own failure”⁴⁵ such that resignification as a point of resistance would involve the reiteration of different performances over time, resulting in a redefining of normative laws themselves. My point of contention here is, that while Butler’s critique has been instrumental in gaining ground for feminist and queer politics, its reliance on Hegel’s dialectical ontology leaves us with only a partial negation of oppressive practices and organizations of power. In attempts at a fuller, absolute, and indeterminate negation, I turn to Nietzsche and the downstream nondialectical ontology of Foucault.

Total Negation and Nondialectical Resistance

For Nietzsche, Hegel’s dialectical and determinate (productive) negation is only partial. Thesis and antithesis produce synthesis, whereby the processes that foment the destruction of certain modes are also a form of its replacement — destruction is always accompanied by a creation, but creation as a derivative of the partially destroyed mode. In the essay “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” Nietzsche explores the relationship between the past and the present and employs his genealogical approach seeking to answer questions about the ways in which a particular and contingent past informs and can be found in contingent modes of the present. For Hegel, the past, present, and future are all in a similar fashion inevitable, as determined by the dialectical relationship, where historical development comes to represent the increasing rationalization of knowledge. As we interact with the world and with each other in the world, the structures of knowledge fall under the increasing scope of reason such that history is

⁴⁴ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 108.

⁴⁵ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 108.

defined by the manifestation and awareness of — a consciousness of — latent dialectical content. Nietzsche assesses the Hegelian dialectic (or any dialectic) as a defeatist attitude towards one's present, or at very least a resignation or passive acceptance. Tracy Strong reminds us "the sound and fury of the historical dialectic which so obsesses Hegel and Marx is, for Nietzsche, merely the significance of the slow, unfolding victory of one kind of existence..."⁴⁶

Of this one kind of existence and, more specifically, of the imprisoned will, Nietzsche tells us in *Thus Spoke*: "The now and the past on earth — alas, my friends, that is what *I* find most unendurable; and I should not know how to live if I were not also a seer of that which must come. A seer, a willer, a creator, a future himself and a bridge to the future — and alas, also, as it were, a cripple at this bridge."⁴⁷ The madness of the imprisoned will seeks to "redeem those who lived in the past and to recreate all 'it was' into a 'thus I willed it'," such that "everything passes away; therefore everything deserves to pass away. And this too is justice, this law of time that it must devour its children. Thus preached madness."⁴⁸ Such madness, for Nietzsche, such resignation and defeat, is none other than thought that we should, in one form or another, *adapt* ourselves to history — to make it our own through an imprisoned, false willing. Rather than seeking to justify the present in terms of what 'it was', he seeks to employ a genealogical approach to historical organizations that create and work in the service of living.

In "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," Nietzsche asserts three methods of history: a monumental method, an antiquarian method, and a critical method. While the first two methods serve to preserve different elements of the past in one way or another, Nietzsche focuses on the third, critical method that problematizes the past. It is necessary, he tells us, for

⁴⁶ Tracy Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 253.

⁴⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kauffmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), 138, emphasis original.

⁴⁸ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 139-40.

‘mankind’ to have this critical mode: “If he is to live, man must possess and from time to time employ the strength to break up and dissolve a part of the past: he does this by bringing it before the tribunal, scrupulously examining it and finally condemning it; every past, however, is worthy to be condemned — for that is the nature of human things: human violence and weakness have always played a mighty role in them.”⁴⁹ It is this method that he employs against Hegel (and certainly others) such that he finds in the master-slave narrative the valorization of a reactive force turned in on itself. The absolute negation of the master is paired with the partial negation of the slave, who seeks to affirm life through the confrontation with the master where the slave interiorizes this negation into an identity and self-consciousness. For Nietzsche, Hegel’s master-slave dialectic does exist — so does Marx’s — but only within a certain (slave) morality. A morality that affords the slave an interiority, a negation transformed in to an interiority as an understanding of one’s essence, whereby the negated term — the abject — comes to affirm the system that defines them. This interiority and passive acceptance runs counter to Nietzsche’s (and Foucault’s) death of man and an interest in the transvaluation of values.

For Nietzsche, only an act of total destruction will suffice. As Roach puts it, “while the (Hegelian) resignification of homosexual is subversive, its (Nietzschean) destruction — in the form of devalorization — is required for autonomous becoming.”⁵⁰ Through acts of total destruction and complete negation, the slave eradicates both this self-understanding of one’s essential nature and the organizations of power that affirm/employ such understandings. Foucault talks about the insufficiency of gay and sexual liberation movements as part of his “repressive hypothesis” that serve largely to reinforce the link between truth and sexuality. Contemporary politics of “coming out,” for example, are a means of tethering the individual to his or her sexual

⁴⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 75-6.

⁵⁰ Roach, *Friendship as a Way of Life*, 69.

truth, as determined by the limits of contemporary discourse. The act of coming out, as a citation of heteronormative laws governing sexuality, is to step into predetermined identities, categories, and typologies that define what it is to “come out” to begin with.

Foucault is critical — and at the same time affirming — of movements that seek to resignify or reclaim heteronormative categories and identities. In “The Social Triumph of the Sexual Will,” he asserts that such practices are still practices of certain relational forms:

if you ask [gay and lesbian individuals] to reproduce the marriage bond for their personal relationships to be recognized, the progress made is slight. We live in a relational world that institutions have considerably impoverished. Society and the institutions which frame it have limited the possibility of relationships because a rich relational world would be very complex to manage.⁵¹

What is needed, then, is the strengthening of this relational fabric by rejecting the identities employed by biopolitical institutions and established organizations of power. Foucault continues:

Rather than saying what we said at one time: ‘Let’s try to re-introduce homosexuality into the general norm of social relations,’ let’s say the reverse: ‘No! Let’s escape as much as possible from the type of relations which society proposes for us and try to create an empty space where we are new relational possibilities.’ The gay movement has a future which goes beyond gays themselves ... it may include the possibility of a culture in the large sense, a culture which invents ways of relating, types of existence, types of values, types of exchanges between individuals that are really new and are neither the same as, nor superimposed on, existing cultural forms.⁵²

The creation of ‘an empty space’ that allows for the invention of ‘really new,’ non-existing cultural formations requires a total destruction and the absolute negation of a master-slave dialectic that produces an affirming interiority and identity. It is in this direction that Foucault takes from and builds on Nietzsche’s thought towards a transvaluation of values. The delinking of truth from sexuality, of sexuality as an interiority, is a ready example.

As Roach points out, the essential nature of the contemporary gay identity is ‘smeared with the blood of the master’s hands’ and facilitates the validation of dominant discursive practices. What is needed is a total critique that goes beyond “simply championing the negated

⁵¹ Michel Foucault, “The Social Triumph of the Sexual Will,” in *The Essential Works Of Michel Foucault Vol. 1, Ethics*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997), 158.

⁵² Foucault, “The Social Triumph of the Sexual Will,” 160.

abject, but attack[s] with full force the system that devalues such ‘monsters’ by destroying the essence that results from the intermingling of master-slave.”⁵³ Butler’s (and other dialectical) critique(s) is (are) only partial, leaving the externally manifested essential nature of the abject, as determined by the master-slave relation, intact. Foucault makes a more radical gesture with his immanent and nondialectical approach that, in attempts to get free of one’s self, seeks the destruction necessary for the creation of empty spaces that an aesthetic of existence can operate in. In a similar way, Monique Wittig asserts such a gesture in her essay “The Straight Mind,” where she creates her ‘lesbian’ in the empty space left behind after with the destruction of the heteronormative category of ‘women’: “... it would be incorrect to say that lesbians associate, make love, live with women, for ‘woman’ has meaning only in heterosexual systems of thought and heterosexual economic systems. Lesbians are not women.”⁵⁴

New selves are needed. Vital in the destruction of the old, dialectical selves and the process of inventing new selves is Nietzsche’s understanding of becoming and Foucault’s derivation in his assertions on technologies of the self. Importantly, as opposed to dialectical difference, Nietzschean difference is produced by the self (self-emergent) and not constructed by any outside organizational or relational forms and then internalized by individuals (self-conscious). Additionally, rather than a teleological unfolding, Nietzsche’s always-becoming is tied to contingency itself, where being is an ongoing and never ceasing process. Everything for Nietzsche hinges on the role of the negative in relational organizations between ‘same’ and ‘other’, where in relations between same and other there is no negation or denial of the other and difference is always affirmed. The negative is not a part of the activating essence but, rather, comes afterwards as the product of activity — the result of existence itself and the affirmation of

⁵³ Roach, *Friendship as a Way of Life*, 70.

⁵⁴ Monique Wittig, “The Straight Mind,” in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 32.

its difference. Replacing the dialectical terms of negation and opposition with difference and affirmation, Nietzsche's finds his 'yes' saying in direct opposition to dialectical 'no' of Hegel and others. Slave morality is the process of resentment becoming creative and giving birth to values, Nietzsche tells us, such that those under slave moralities are deprived of the proper outlet for action and are left with only an imaginary revenge — *ressentiment*. While “every aristocratic morality springs from a triumphant affirmation of its own demands, the slave morality says ‘no’ from the very outset of what is ‘outside itself,’ ‘different from itself,’ and ‘not itself’: and this ‘no’ is its creative deed.”⁵⁵

Gilles Deleuze elaborates on the anti-dialectical nature of Nietzsche's conception of power, asserting that, for Nietzsche, the dialectical aspect of the master-slave relationship “depends on the fact that power is conceived not as will to power but as representation of power, representation of superiority, recognition by ‘the one’ of the superiority of ‘the other’.”⁵⁶ Within slave moralities such as Hegel's dialectic, the man of *ressentiment* seeks only the recognition of power in the form of representation, a representation that is itself dependent upon on the antagonism of the dialectic and therefore only serves to reinforce and perpetuate established values — reiteration/citation. For Nietzsche, individuals within the dialectic lack the strength to affirm their difference in a manner that makes them no longer active but reactive to the forces that dominate them, highlighting the negative aspects of its relational organization. This dominating force, then, “denies all that it is not and makes this negation its own essence and the principle of its existence.”⁵⁷ For Foucault and ‘getting free from one's self,’ as for Nietzsche and his *Übermensch*, it becomes necessary to overcome one's self as an *essential* constitution. For

⁵⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Horace B. Samuel (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 2006), Essay I §10.

⁵⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Continuum, 1986), 10.

⁵⁷ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 9.

Nietzsche, the *Übermensch* is set against a dialectical conception of subjectivity as transvaluation is set against the internalizing of dialectical competition: overcoming itself is opposed to notions of preservation, (re)appropriation, and dialectical pseudo-transformations such that, for Deleuze, “The overman has nothing in common with the species being of the dialecticians, with man as species or with the ego. Neither ego nor man is unique.”⁵⁸ Deleuze continues: “The overman is defined by a new way of feeling: he is a different subject from man, something other than the human type. A new way of thinking, predicates other than divine ones...A new way of evaluating: not a change of values, not an abstract transposition nor a dialectical reversal, but a change and reversal in the element from which the value of values derives, a ‘transvaluation’.”⁵⁹

The takeaway here is not that Foucault’s attempts at developing an aesthetics of existence are firmly rooted in a Nietzschean understanding of the Greeks, that he discovers Nietzsche in the Ancients, but rather the Nietzschean — and not Hegelian — reworking of ethical subjectivity and practices of the self. Whereas difference is secondary for Hegel it is primary for Nietzsche such that the terms of Butler’s Hegelian dialectic and her championing of the abject are only ever subject to resignification. Foucault offers us something more, something that allows us to create the empty spaces needed for truly new modes of subjectivity, new techniques of the self, and new relational organizations. He deconstructs and negates with genealogy and offers alternative modes of self-constitution through estrangement and discomfort. For Foucault, being does not proceed through processes of negation but, rather, through an immanent, constitutive difference where the forces of creation are not dialectical but are inseparable from their point of immanence. Divesting subjectivity of its Hegelian antithesis and synthesis, Foucault’s “negation

⁵⁸ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 163.

⁵⁹ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 163.

is thus total and creation autonomous” where such “an absolute negation can engender new forms of being and relation not answerable to that which constituted them. In this ontological schematic, the past *can* be left behind.”⁶⁰ Such nondialectical negation is necessary for breaking free from practices of normativity as citation of law. As we discussed at the beginning of the chapter, for Foucault, everyone has their own, immanent way of changing that become stifled under normative reiteration: “In this matter, nothing is more arrogant than to try to dictate to others. My way of being no longer the same is, by definition, the most singular part of what I am.”⁶¹

Power, for Foucault, as we know, exists outside of — yet is manifest in — discursive practices, and consists of (at least) an active and a reactive mode. Active, immanent, productive ‘power’ serves as a substrate for force relations, which come to engender ‘Power’ of solidified (or manifest) institutions and practices.⁶² In this way, as we saw in Chapter Four, Foucault (after Nietzsche) historicizes agency and power as force relations that are historically determined. Foucault’s understanding of power is that of a relational organization of immanent difference that is at the same time a proliferation of difference as opposed to Hegelian homogenization. The key for Foucault — and importantly for us here — is to capture this productive power. If institutions and practices of domination are constructed around the concretizing of an immanent difference-in-common, the arrest of movement and difference, the goal becomes to identify and dismantle such practices and reestablish the movement of power towards something different — something that facilitates the singular immanence of different forms. As Roach asserts, “[i]f such power were organized toward the active becoming of dissimilar singularities, as opposed to the

⁶⁰ Roach, *Friendship as a Way of Life*, 74.

⁶¹ See intra note 24.

⁶² See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol I*, trans Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 92-102.

reproduction of a system of order that makes difference identical, power would then be valorized in its life-affirming creativity.”⁶³ This is what Foucault seeks in his aesthetic of existence, an ethical mode where the self is created at the interstices of modes of subjection and practices of subjectivation. He sees his aesthetics as a way of undoing and unworking modes of subjection through practices of the self that facilitate the employment of those now freed force relations towards something otherwise — towards practices of becoming and self-creating that result in a different, and more radical, mode of resistance than what dialectical thinkers can offer.

In Foucault’s attempts at aligning the performative with the aesthetic rather than the juridical model, the ethical value of any act comes not from the reiteration of a norm but from the transformation of one’s existence. The self, here, does not come from the internalization of the laws that one is subjected to but, rather, from the process of subjectivation where techniques of the self are aimed at reorganizing force relations and employing them otherwise. In viewing power and subjectivity as immanence, discursive regimes are never totalizing for Foucault, they never had a complete grip. Recall that for Foucault inherent in all power relations is the relationship between power and refusal. The ability and capability for resistance is a condition for the exertion of power; without such abilities relations of power would not exist, only domination. For Foucault resistance is a freeness that opposes and allows for the practice of power: remember power for Foucault is the functioning of ‘conducting the conduct of others’ and directing their behavior and so an element of freedom is required — a certain form of liberty — and there is necessarily the possibility of resistance. As he tells us regarding biopower in *The History of Sexuality vol. I*, “It is not that life has been totally integrated into techniques that govern and administer it; it constantly escapes them.”⁶⁴ In employing these new techniques of

⁶³ Roach, *Friendship as a Way of Life*, 76.

⁶⁴ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol I*, 143.

self, Foucault seeks transgressions at the frontiers of historically conditioned discursive regimes, where an aesthetic of existence might interrogate and interrupt or overcome historical contextualization. The task is to dissociate ethics from forms of knowledge and the obligation to understand/identify/be one's self. His aesthetic of existence is aimed at just such a task: not to discover the truth of one's self but to *perform* one's self through acts of creation and perpetual becoming.

Importantly, Foucault concerns himself with modes of resistance that oppose power itself and not the effects of power. While he certainly addresses institutions of domination, Foucault is demarcating the space of two forms of power — 'Power' and 'power' — that allow him to distinguish states of domination from force relations. In his analyses on sexuality and, for our purposes here, his aesthetics as resistance to modes of power, Foucault tells us that

[t]he analysis, made in terms of power, must not assume that the sovereignty of the state, the form of the law, or the over-all unity of a domination are given at the outset; rather, these are only the terminal forms power takes. It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instances as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization...⁶⁵

It is this distinction between the two modes of power that separates Butler and Foucault and result in different modes and practices of resistance. Where Foucault separates the institutional effects of power from force relations, Butler see only the juridical model of discursive power. She asserts in *Bodies that Matter* that "there is no power that acts, but only a reiterated acting that is power in its persistence and instability."⁶⁶ In her later book, *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler continues her project of bringing Foucauldian politics and Lacanian psychoanalysis together where, importantly, she sees power as a single, discursive mode and does away with any form of extra-discursive power. Discussing theories of the subject, Butler's concern is in accounting for the 'full ambivalence of the conditions of its operation,' suggesting that "[t]here

⁶⁵ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol I*, 92.

⁶⁶ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 9.

is, as it were, no conceptual transition to be made between power as external to the subject, ‘acting on,’ and power as constitutive of the subject, ‘acted by.’”⁶⁷ In collapsing Foucault’s two workings of power, resistance for Butler — as we have seen — can only come from under/within the regimes of power it opposes. She continues: “[p]ower acts on the subject, an acting that is an enacting: an irresolvable ambiguity arises when one attempts to distinguish between the power that (transitively) enacts the subject, and the power enacted by the subject...”⁶⁸

Butler asserts that the possibility of subversion and resistance often appear for Foucault either as “a subjectivation that exceeds the normalizing aims by which it is mobilized” or “through convergence with other discursive regimes” that undermine normalization. Noting the understanding that Foucault has of power and resistance existing side by side, resistance comes to appear as the effect of power, as a part of power, its self-subversion.”⁶⁹ She continues, referencing Foucault’s work on homosexuality, asserting that if he could take up and use a sign for other than its intended purpose, “then he understood that even the most noxious terms could be owned, that the most injurious interpellations could also be the site of radical reoccupation and resignification.”⁷⁰ While this is certainly true, as we have discussed, Foucault also offers us something more. She attributes Foucault with a resistance to Power, but underestimates his resistance as it concerns power as force relations. The importance of Foucault’s understanding of power as domination and power as force relations is that it facilitates an opposition that attempts practices of leaving behind and creating anew, of resistances aimed at becoming otherwise. Butler’s resistance does not allow for an outside or an otherwise in the radical sense that Foucault seeks: “Called by an injurious name, I come into social being... I am led to embrace the

⁶⁷ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 15.

⁶⁸ Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 15.

⁶⁹ Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 93.

⁷⁰ Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 104.

terms that injure me because they constitute me socially.”⁷¹ It is only through the occupation of and by “that injurious term can I resist and oppose it, recasting the power that constitutes me as the power I oppose.”⁷² In light of this, Butler asserts, any resistance to subjection will take subjection as its resource, such that “attachment to an injurious interpellation will, by way of a necessarily alienated narcissism, become the condition under which resignifying that interpellation becomes possible. This will not be an unconscious outside of power, but rather something like the unconscious of power itself, in its traumatic and productive iterability.”⁷³

What Butler under employs, and what we lose, is the becoming of resistance; where she is bound to the signifier, Foucault seeks to leave the signifier behind and facilitate a process of becoming otherwise. For, as Roach puts it, “if resistance occurs only after interpellation — even when this hailing is resignified into a self-empowering marker of identity — then such resistance begins only after the being of becoming freezes.”⁷⁴ The effort here is to not only resist the effects of power, its biopolitical institutions and practices, but also add other tactics that oppose the productive aspects of power. Rather than subsuming power under unilateral discursive practices/the juridical model alone, we need to take a multi-pronged approach that confers mobility on the subject. By accounting for force relations and the institutional organizations of those force relations, Foucault gives us a fuller account of power and the ability to break away from discursive practice and move towards more creative practices that exist outside of oppressive biopolitical institutions. Within such practices, resistance becomes *not only* an engagement and opposition to current forms of domination, but the employment of practices

⁷¹ Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 104.

⁷² Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 104.

⁷³ Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 104.

⁷⁴ Roach, *Friendship as a Way of Life*, 79.

aimed at going beyond such resistance towards the formation of new techniques of self and relational organizations that are not answerable to those modes that constituted them.

History — and more importantly the present — is strewn with discarded, destroyed, abjected, marginalized, and alienated individuals as subjectivities that need to be recognized and affirmed. What I am suggesting is an addition to the strategy of a reverse discourse: a multi-pronged approach in our pursuit of modes of relationality that take us beyond the identities created by contemporary practices of violence and the ways that violence is mourned. Queer studies, as one example, has recognized the limitations of reverse discourse but its strategic approach remains firmly rooted in this methodology. Employment of the term ‘queer’ itself and the turn towards stigma rather than shying away from it is the practice of such a reverse discourse; given its ability to be turned, twisted, and redeployed from its prior usage towards the expansion of antihomophobic politics, stigma becomes a crucial point of departure. The task at hand in any reverse discourse is a double movement: the simultaneous reaching into a past haunted by stigma and injury and a moving forward into a discourse, with that history, twisting and turning it into a different future. In attempts to turn stigma and social abjection into agency and empowerment, I fear the difficulties of the past are over looked in an eagerness to turn stigmatized histories into positive political purposes. Such a strategy, I believe, makes it harder to see the persistence of the past in the present. While certainly not discounting the importance of the work being done and the ground that has been and is being made by a strategic reversal of discourse, I want to suggest the further development of a politics of the past. In doing so, we might more fully interrogate an account of the modern experience of violence in ways that change our relationship to the past through the ways we relate to each other, both now and in the future.

At one point in “Friendship as a way of Life,” Foucault asserts that it is not homosexual sex that will challenge existing social norms or even serve as any truly disrupting value. There is not much shock value, he tells us, in the expected image of “two young men meeting in the street, seducing each other with a look, grabbing each other’s asses and getting each other off in a quarter of an hour.” Such expectations, canned into neat images of homosexuality, do not generate any unease or formidable challenge to prevail norms for two reasons: First, “it responds to a reassuring canon of beauty,” and second, “it cancels everything that can be troubling in affection, tenderness, friendship, fidelity, camaraderie, and companionship.”⁷⁵ Foucault instead points to new forms of homosexual intimacy as a disrupting force and of new relationalities forged by estrangement and discomfort. Some of Foucault’s critics read his call for “new relational modes” as politically evasive; a move that side steps rather than engages directly the immediacy of contemporary social issues. I, however, read this call for a new relationality as an explicit call to action — a political and ethical imperative that opens the inventiveness of the future against the ‘determinations’ of the past.

What is needed are new modes of relationality — new ways of being present with one another and with ourselves — that divest us of inherited self-protective identities. An initial step in this direction is a retooling of a politics of the past and the way we conceive history as played out in memory, mourning, and the ways in which the past gives meaning to contemporary experience. Our criticism is rooted in an injurious history and present riddled with violence and suffering and we must escape the current modes that seek historical redemption for and from these histories.

⁷⁵ Michel Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life,” 136.

Reckoning Death

We mourn in certain ways because we conceptualize death in certain ways. The implications of human mortality have been both emphasized and trivialized in Western thought, some placing death at the center of the human experience, others relegating it to an afterthought. We are familiar with Homer's dictum that it is "better to flee from death than feel its grip,"⁷⁶ and Socrates' assertion in the *Apology* that death is either nothing, a dreamless sleep, or a relocation of the soul.⁷⁷ Albert Camus tells us that "since we're all going to die, it's obvious that when and how don't matter."⁷⁸ It is important to note the historical differences in the way death has been referenced and the way it is talked about. When Epicurus speaks of death with the adage "death, therefore, the most awful of evils, is nothing to us, seeing that, when we are, death is not come, and, when death is come, we are not"⁷⁹ he is referring to death itself, the exact moment that one is no longer. This is different than speaking of dying and of death as a possibility.

Death is largely taken to be the paragon of the individual experience; it is our ownmost experience that cannot be shared nor actualized in another form. No one can speak of "my death" but myself; I, alone, could narrate my death — on the condition that I survive it. At the instant of our death, however, we are anticipating its arrival at the same time it is passing us by. Our most intimate encounter we ourselves will never experience: death cannot be actualized in itself for ourselves. Jacques Derrida writes in *Aporias*, "dying would be the aporia, the impossibility of being dead, the impossibility of living or rather 'existing' ones death."⁸⁰ In the very possibility that death is the cessation of experience, the instant of our death — the experience itself —

⁷⁶ Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin Classics, 1998), 372.

⁷⁷ Plato, "Apology," in *Five Dialogues*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2002), 43.

⁷⁸ Albert Camus, *The Stranger*, trans. Matthew Ward (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 114.

⁷⁹ Robert Drew Hicks, *The Epochs of Philosophy: Stoic and Epicurean* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 169.

⁸⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Aporias* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 73.

becomes problematic: “where the figure of the step is refused to intuition, where ... the identity of oneself and therefore the possible identification of an intangible edge — the crossing of the line — becomes a problem.”⁸¹ Derrida argues that this very impossibility is what allows for a notion of the possible: “the im-possibility is thus not simply the opposite of the possible. It seems only to be opposed but it also supports possibility: it passes through it and leaves it in the trace of its taking away.”⁸² The problematic of death, for Derrida, is not one that is to be solved (or *could be* solved), but is rather an aporia that is to be endured (awaited) as an impossible possibility.

Death, as the unattainable, the unknown, yet ever present *act* is the unexperienced experience. Death comes to us from the outside, in the form of others. We can only ever experience the death of an other and it is through the interiorization of their death and our relation to the dead that we come to understand its meaning for us. Such a relation is constituted on the fact that those around us will cease to exist. When such an unrepeatable event occurs — the death of an other — we must account for their death within ourselves. We must reckon with the dead — those who are no longer with us except, perhaps, as they exist within us. We relate one death to another, and death to ourselves, through the act of mourning and in mourning we must account for the loss of others while we still exist, while we live on. The practices of mourning are not preexisting, timeless forms but are instead the social practices of remembering that serve in part to (re)produce and maintain pictures of the self and relations of power. Importantly, in their mobility practices of remembering as the sites of memory and trauma can serve to reaffirm systems of power and images of the self, or they can act in a disruptive capacity.

⁸¹ Derrida, *Aporias*, 11.

⁸² Jacques Derrida, *Paper Machine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 91.

In his work, Derrida suggests that that is only ‘in us’ that the dead may speak and it is within us that the dead are kept alive. Mourning, for Derrida, consists in interiorizing the other and recognizing that if we are to give the dead anything it can now only be in us, the living.⁸³ Importantly, there is a demarcation as to what is ours and what belongs to the other within us. Derrida reminds us that what we interiorize is ‘within us but it is not ours’, suggesting an interiorization of that which can never be interiorized, “of what is before and beyond us as the source of our responsibility.”⁸⁴ It is in this interiorization of the dead that we maintain our relation to them and them to us. It is through mourning, the working of the dead in us, that we are affected. Writing in *Memoires for Paul de Man*, Derrida notes, that “since Freud, this is how the ‘normal’ ‘work of mourning’ is often described. It entails a movement in which an interiorizing idealization takes in itself or upon itself the body and voice of the other, the other’s visage and person, ideally and quasi-literally devouring them.”⁸⁵ This ‘devouring’ of the other as a practice of mourning their death is facilitated by, and calls for, concretized identities. If, however, there are no solidified identities to devour, our relationships to other and to death become something different. In considering different relationalities to death, Maurice Blanchot is useful in building a conversation around the indeterminate nature of death, allowing us to differentiate between death and dying, and the roles each play in our reckoning with the loss of others. To address death, for Blanchot, we must start with its very impossibility and the distinction he makes between death and dying:

There is in death, it would seem, something stronger than death; it is dying itself - the intensity of dying, the push of the impossible, the pressure of the undesirable even in the most desired. Death is power and even strength — limited, therefore. It sets a final date, it adjourns in the sense that it assigns to a given day — both random and necessary — at the same time that it defers till an undesignated day. But dying is un-power. It wrests from the present, it is always a step over the

⁸³ Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, “To Reckon With the Dead: Jacques Derrida's Politics of Mourning,” in *The Work of Mourning*, by Jacques Derrida (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 9.

⁸⁴ Brault and Naas, “To Reckon With the Dead,” 11.

⁸⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Memoires for Paul de Man* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 34.

edge, it rules out every conclusion and all ends, it does not free nor does it shelter. In death, one can find an illusory refuge: the grave is as far as gravity can pull, it marks the end of the fall; the mortuary is the loophole in the impasse. But dying flees and pulls indefinitely, impossibly and intensively in the flight.⁸⁶

The pull of dying, for Blanchot, is not a creative force. This attraction is not really a force at all, but a void. It is a void that demands from us, more so than any presence. Where Blanchot sees death as a loss, dominant discursive practices represent death as a positive force or action. Death is typically represented as an entity that is to be pursued in order to confront it and as a creative force as opposed to a void that negates. Contemporary thinking of death aligns with much of the Western philosophical tradition, following Hegel's mastery over death and Heidegger's 'ownmost possibility' by employing a thinking that places human creativity as the determinant of all that is possible: the world is passive and the human alone is active. From this came the conclusion that death is a possibility of human action — a *possible* future ("knowledge," "understanding," "comprehension," and so on...). Death has become another human endeavor to be controlled and mastered, tamed, ordered, and comprehended in our domination over nature and its forces.

For Blanchot, and for our consideration of thinking death otherwise, it is the inability to control death, to master, it, that unhinges traditional thinking. This inability to control death is what makes life (dying, the unexperienced-experience) what it is. Blanchot tells us that it is life that keeps us from death:

[D]eath is man's possibility, his chance, it is through death that the future of a finished world is still there for us; death is man's greatest hope, his only hope of being man. This is why existence is his only real dread...existence frightens him, not because of death which could put an end to it, but because it excludes death, because it is still there underneath death, a presence in the depths of absence, an inexorable day in which all days rise and set. And there is no question that we are preoccupied by dying. But why? It is because when we die, we leave behind not only the world but also death ... and my impending death horrifies me because I see it as it is: no longer death but the impossibility of dying.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 47-48.

⁸⁷ Maurice Blanchot, *The Gaze of Orpheus* (Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 1981), 55.

Traditionally, death is seen as stabilizing, an inevitability that adds an element of control to our otherwise unstable and unpredictable lives. But as Dominick Lacapra notes in *History and Memory after Auschwitz* our attempts at mastering death through acts of mourning don't "provide the full enlightenment or a definitive liberation from the constraints of the past."⁸⁸ Because of this, "working through problems in any comprehensive sense requires the active recognition that there always remain in thought and in social life a 'stain,' impurity, or residue of the past that cannot be entirely eliminated or made good."⁸⁹ We will always have, on some level, ties to the past that affect our behaviors and our attitudes; that will, to some degree, affect our relations with others and with ourselves. It is this 'stain' that I am attempting to address in new ways and with new modes that do not remain within the dichotomous logic that introduced such a residue in the first place but, rather, expose the processes of becoming within the relationalities that surround trauma.

In *Friendship*, Maurice Blanchot articulates a unity after death that serves as an erasure of separation. Speaking on the 'movement of dying', Blanchot tells us that when "the event itself comes, it brings this change: not the deepening of the separation but its erasure; not the widening of the caesura but its leveling out and the dissipation of the void between us where formerly there developed the frankness of a relation without history."⁹⁰ This 'dissipation' speaks to the distinction between the other as interiorized — that is, the other as for us — and the other for herself. In death, what had previously made the deceased exterior to ourselves disappears and we unite with the object of our mourning with the understanding that what is within us is not ours.

⁸⁸ Dominick Lacapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 186.

⁸⁹ Lacapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, 187.

⁹⁰ Maurice Blanchot, *Friendship* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 292.

The Memory of Redemption

Attempts at reclaiming the past are bound to and by failure. To reconstruct a history, a narrative, we must grasp at the obscurity of an injurious past in attempts at resurrection. Our attempts at memorialization and mourning are meant as both a reconciling and an overcoming of a past that exists alongside the seemingly endless flow of new bodies; a damaging past that stays with us as we bury the dead and mourn. Contemporary practices of mourning and memorialization have us living alongside the dead in our attempts at historical reconciliation and redemption, maintaining a positioning that holds us — whether we succeed in redemption or not — amongst those already dead. As we attempt such processes, we build on ruins and the endeavor becomes one of engaging a past without being destroyed by it. A nondialectical relationality, on the other hand, would come to depend less on the recovering of identities and meanings from the past and more on conceiving discursive practices oriented towards as yet undefined ways of being present with one another. Such experiments would prioritize the experience of relational transformations over knowledge of identities, displacing the search for psychic truths with the experience of new relational modes.

Pushing against the logic of a dialectical history, Walter Benjamin asserts in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History” that the course of history should not be a letting the dead bury the dead as Marx would have it. Marx suggests in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* that “[t]he social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot take its poetry from the past but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped away all superstition about the past. The former revolutions required recollections of past world history in order to smother their own content. The revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead in order

to arrive at its own content.”⁹¹ Benjamin suggests, as an alternative, that it is only by being haunted by the past that we may change the course of history. Calling for “Messianic time,” he notes the constant expectancy of the prophets in Jewish mysticism, a state in which “every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter”⁹² that withheld the possibility of redemption yet demanded its pursuit. What Benjamin seeks is the invocation of an expectancy without certainty, a way of being in a present that adheres to a past in ways that leave the future open.

Benjamin employs his well-known conception of the “angel of history” as means of maintaining contact with an injurious past that turns away from the future. Suggesting a certain view of the past and maintaining the past in our present without the possibility of redemption is not to suggest a hopelessness or a future consisting of ‘homogenous, empty time.’ Benjamin’s comments on Paul Klee’s “Angelus Novus” are worth quoting in full:

A Klee painting named “Angelus Novus” shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.⁹³

Contemporary practices of mourning and memorialization would have us move on from the past and from injury, believing that it is these acts that allow us redemption and reconciliation with our involvement in or complicity with trauma and violence. Such do not allow for a sustained engagement with a negative past nor allow for the expectancy without certainty that Benjamin seeks; they seek, rather, to concretize historical events in attempts to concretize a future and

⁹¹ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York, International Publishers, 2008), 18.

⁹² Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 264.

⁹³ Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 257-8.

secure stable identities through the fixing of knowledge and truth. The angel of history, for Benjamin, seeks to redeem the past: “he would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed,” but he is unable to do so. His head turned, his eyes fixed on a past as wreckage, as one single, continuous catastrophe, he turns his back on the future by refusing to let the destruction and loss of the past become the material for progress. His attempts to stay amongst the rubble, however, are spoiled by a storm that catches his wings, dragging him into the future.

What is highlighted in this account is the trauma and violence that the angel of history experiences in his pursuit of historical redemption. If we are to adequately deal with an injurious past, Benjamin suggests, we have to be hurt by it; that is, we cannot hide from it or address it superficially, but we must expose ourselves to it and linger in it. As bad as the events themselves can be, equally egregious is the thought of leaving the past behind. As Heather Love notes in *Feeling Backward*, much of the recent work on trauma, loss, and memory that employs Benjamin’s angel of history portrays the witness as a beaten and passive figure that possesses questionable abilities to participate in the rigorous demands of effecting political change. She suggests that a crucial paradox of political life lies at the heart of this ambivalence: “[a]lthough historical losses instill in us a desire for change, they can also unfit us for the activity of making change. If we look back, we may not be able to pull ourselves away from the spectacle of Sodom in flames.”⁹⁴

In many ways this true: a traumatic past can be a site of overwhelming anxiety and source of fear. It can hinder, if not completely debilitate, us in our attempts to reconcile the past with our lives in the present. But in another way, an injurious past also serves as a rally cry, a call to action and a literal call to arms. Just as much as violence is perpetuated in the name of

⁹⁴ Love, *Feeling Backward*, 149.

geography, the economy, freedom, and so on and serves the ends of racism and domination, the conduct of violence is about memory. Memory is an outcome of present activities and experience, much of which are shaped by violence and war; experiences as subjectivities that asserts a branding through acts of memory building. Put another way, one objective for war and violence is memory building.

Violence asserts a present as a representation of a past in attempts to secure a future. Rhetorical tropes along the lines of “making the world safe for democracy” and “securing the legacy of freedom for future generations” are all too common when explaining away modern military interventions. Such conceptions are inherent in contemporary ‘pictures’ of violence which serve to marginalize violence as an ethical concern as it becomes effaced through the way it is (re)presented to us via others and via modes of self-understanding. The instances of domination that are proliferated by these pictures shape our identities through their reinforcement of everyday actions and practices. This is not to say, however, that the criteria for our responses are entirely dependent upon operant conditioning. While this is true to an extent, experience and response is never as simple as the presence or absence of a behavioral norm. What is important — and illuminating — in the consideration of ‘pictures’ and ‘criteria’ is that normatively conditioned behavior cannot be identified independently of the experience and/or a response in question. In other words, the identification of the normative behavior itself is already a response.

The ability for memory to serve as a call to arms comes from, in part, the enabling and empowering function of normalizing practices where we are not always reduced to the inability to act or respond. My argument, in part, is that the intensification of power relations over processes of mourning and memorialization leads to an increase in abilities and capabilities: the increased capacity to mourn through new memorials and the proliferation of social organizations

that ‘recognize’ and ‘honor’ the heroics and sacrifices made by the military, fire fighters, police, and other public servants; we have become acutely aware of the shortcomings of veteran’s healthcare and the issues surrounding things like PTSD and have taken measures that ensure adequate treatment; we have congressional committees issuing reports on the torture practices and drone-strike operations of the U.S. government; and so on. The intensifications of power are readily accessible in these new capacity expanding and enabling functions. Such technologies, as one example, assign a “severity rating” on a scale of 0 to 4 to military members and veterans to assess their levels of PTSD, as assessed by the twenty symptoms listed in DSM-5,⁹⁵ and where disability compensation is determined by percentage points (e.g. a “60% disability rating”) based off this assessment.⁹⁶

Here, the inner self and the outer representation are directly translated into quantifiable data about individuals and populations. Assessments and severity ratings are based on self-reporting and a quasi-verification of the “stressor” (the event that caused or resulted in PTSD), where individuals are interviewed (interrogated?) by mental healthcare professionals and fill out forms for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA forms 21-0781 and 21-526 EZ, among others) detailing “stressful incident no. 1,” “stressful incident no. 2,” the date and location of the “incident,” as well describing the event itself, including the names of those wounded or killed in action. These self-reporting technologies and means of assessing and treating PTSD are problematic in many obvious ways that have been identified in veteran populations pre-dating the current PTSD diagnosis.⁹⁷ The stigma of PTSD as a perceived weakness, especially in the

⁹⁵ “Clinician-Administered PTSD Scale for DSM-5,” United States Department of Veterans Affairs. Accessed August 27, 2015. <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/assessment/adult-int/caps.asp>.

⁹⁶ “Veterans Compensation Benefits Rate Tables,” United States Department of Veterans Affairs. Accessed August 20, 2015. http://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/resources_comp01.asp.

⁹⁷ 1861-1865: U.S. military physicians document the stresses of Civil War soldiers; 1905: ‘Battle shock’ is regarded as a legitimate medical condition by the Russian Army; 1917-1919: Distress of soldiers is attributed to ‘shell shock’ during WWI; 1939-1945: Terminology changes to ‘combat exhaustion’ during WWII; 1952: ‘Gross stress reaction’

hyper-masculine world of the military, is a strong deterrent for individuals to self-report. Further, the stigma of unmanliness, of not being able to do “what a man needs to do” or be “strong enough to handle the stress,” is often the cause of denial from veterans who will not admit to themselves — let alone others — how they have been affected by traumatic experiences. The picture of a coherent inner/outer selfhood demands the need for an inner self that corresponds with an outer representation of how I *want* to be viewed by others; the way I *am* viewed by others, as “healthy,” “stable,” “capable,” and so on, directly influences the way that I view myself in my internal constitution — even if that means denial and repression.

In thinking ourselves differently in our relation to violence and to each other, we can open potentialities for the growing number of technologies and practices that can be separated from the intensification of power and oriented towards our abilities for self-creation. Nietzsche has an interesting comment on our willingness to, on the one hand, emphasize the meaning of death and trauma, giving it overriding deference in specific areas of life while, on the other, to be more or less ambivalent to the ubiquity of death in every other part of life. From an aphorism in *The Gay Science* titled “The Thought of Death:”

How strange it is that this sole certainty and common element [death] makes almost no impression on people, and that nothing is further from their minds than the feeling that they form a brotherhood of death. It makes me happy that men do not want at all to think the thought of death! I should like very much to do something that would make the thought of life even a hundred times more appealing to them.⁹⁸

Nietzsche calls for an ‘active forgetting’ and asserts the liberating power of a willful abandoning of the past, suggesting that an emphasis on the past precludes agency and happiness in the present and the future. He warns us in “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life” of

was included in *DSM-I*; 1968: ‘Gross stress reaction’ is dropped from *DSM-II*; 1980: ‘Posttraumatic stress disorder’ is added to *DSM-III*; 1987: *DSM-III-R* drops requirement that stressors be outside the range of normal human experience; diagnostic criteria for PTSD were revised in *DSM-III-R* (1987), *DSM-IV* (1994), and *DSM-IV-TR* (2000), and *DSM V* (2013).

⁹⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, “The Thought of Death,” in *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), §278.

the haunting capacity of the past, that the past “returns as a ghost and disturbs the peace of a later moment.”⁹⁹ The act of active forgetting is a selective process that attempts to address our relation to the past in order to overcome these events that might otherwise endure in forms that only serve to haunt us and prevent agency. What is needed, Nietzsche asserts, is a critical interrogation of the past that would determine those elements of the past that would be advantageous for action in the present and those that would be disadvantageous — we keep those forms of truth and knowledge that facilitate present-day agency and forget those that do not.

Nietzsche continues: “In the case of the smallest or of the greatest happiness, however, it is always the same thing that makes happiness happiness: the ability to forget or, expressed in more scholarly fashion, the capacity to feel unhistorically during its duration.”¹⁰⁰ The ‘dark traveler’ that stands behind us all makes no impression on the living and “yet silence will soon descend on all these, noisy, living, life-thirsty people”¹⁰¹ What is needed are new modes of addressing memory and new relationalities that allow us to experience the trauma and deaths that constitute our daily lives in ways that refuse to let the trauma of death restrict or prevent the process of invention. What is needed are modes and relationalities that facilitate new forms of becoming.

Such technologies of the self with regard to methods of mourning and grieving injury resulting from war and other violence, including the memorials we have erected, are seen as expanding our ability to mourn and lay claim to a past. When such capacities are recycled back into modes of normalization, these particular ways of working on the self are counter-productive in terms of both advancing the non-proliferation of violence and for seeking potentialities for the

⁹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 61.

¹⁰⁰ Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” 62.

¹⁰¹ Nietzsche, “The Thought of Death,” 225.

growing number of technologies and practices and separating them from the intensification of power and moving them towards the creation of new modes of relationality.

The Gaze of Redemption

The contemporary work of mourning as the search for comprehension and understanding are attempts made at circumventing the aporias of death and trauma. Limiting trauma in this way is to circumscribe it, to delineate and to assign a recognizable space in the search for control and determinacy. The new modes that I seek give way to the experience of Blanchot's 'dying' — the experiencing of an 'unpower' that neither frees nor provides shelter. In mourning, we are dealing with a loss we cannot exactly account for: we cannot name it and we do not know the exact nature of the object of our mourning. In grieving we are attempting to hold onto the deceased, to not let them be forgotten; the possibility of remembering is, however, already conditioned by the very possibility of forgetting and the failure of mourning. Such pressure is put on the work of mourning, of maintaining the significance of the deceased, that it is almost as if the dead could die a second time. As Banksy notes, "they say you die twice. One time when you stop breathing and a second time, a bit later on, when somebody says your name for the last time."¹⁰²

In spite of this we must act, we must go on living. We must reckon with the interiorized death of an other in the face of the 'impossible possibility.' Death is a certain modality of relation with others and the work of mourning demands that we remember our own past as well as the history of others. Mourning is not merely directed at individuals in our lives, however, but exists alongside the indeterminate nature — the strangeness — of a disposition towards the 'impossible possibility' death of the other as interiorized within ourselves. The unexperienced experience, lived in anticipation of our ownmost death, is living without confirmation of our finitude. These stories of near death interest us because we want answers to our own, personal

¹⁰² Nick Francis, "Banksy in His Own Words," *The Sun*, September 4, 2010, www.thesun.co.uk/

struggle with death. We desire confirmation to alleviate our anxiety over the uncertainty of this instant of death and its inevitability. We desire confirmation of our finitude and knowledge of this instant — and just this instant — as if being able to predict, master, or economize death would somehow give us control and allow us to cope.

This unknown that presents as a tension and a straining engenders a need to know. As finite beings uncertain of the particularity of our deaths, we embody the moments of this residue. So what is this experience? A fear of death? No, the unexperienced experience is something other than the *fear* of death. It is the calling of death to answer the uncertainty of our finitude, a desire towards the confirmation of our finitude. It is the desire for our own death, from which we defend ourselves. It is a strangeness that collides the need for clarity with the world of obscurity. But what constitutes this struggle? Can it be a mistake to assume that obscurity must be dissipated, that darkness must necessarily give way to light and clarity?

One of the fundamental points of Blanchot's thinking is that we must embrace the obscure, that a struggle for coherence must necessarily embrace the unknown, leaving it in its obscurity: poetry and thought, which constitute that struggle, relate 'to the unknown as unknown'. What Blanchot is suggesting is that we are "postulating a relation in which the unknown would be displayed, manifested, uncovered, and from which perspective? — from the very perspective of what keeps it unknown."¹⁰³ The struggle with obscurity, then, between light and dark, is that which produces the work of art: the work is a product of the demand of the obscure. This can be seen in Blanchot's reading of the myth of Orpheus, in which he compares the descent from the world of light into Hades in order to reclaim Eurydice to that of the artistic creative process and, I suggest, is useful for our discussion of the aesthetics and self-fashioning.

¹⁰³ Maurice Blanchot, "Rene Char and thought of the neutral," in *Infinite Conversation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 298-306.

The world as Orpheus knew it consisted of light and darkness, life above and death below. Through the power of ‘art’s strength’, according to Blanchot, Orpheus is able to cross from one world to the other and descend to Eurydice. The myth is traditionally understood as a tale of impatience or madness: all that was required of Orpheus was that he not turn around as he led Eurydice out of Hades. Orpheus, however, desiring to see Eurydice as he knew her — out of the shade and in the light — could not make it all the way out of Hades without turning around. Breaking the rule with his gaze, Orpheus condemned Eurydice to the darkness of the shade. What is important here is that Blanchot does not see the gaze as ruinous, but as necessary. Admittedly, in turning toward Eurydice, Orpheus ruins the work — betraying collectively the work, Eurydice, and the night — it is in this turning back that “the essence of night is revealed as the inessential.”¹⁰⁴ *Not* to look back for Blanchot is to betray the true force of Orpheus’ movement (struggle) which “does not want to see Eurydice in her daytime truth and her everyday appeal, but wants her in her nocturnal obscurity, in her distance . . . not as the intimacy of a familiar life, but as the foreignness of what excludes all intimacy.”¹⁰⁵ Orpheus sacrifices the work and his desire for a happy life lived in the light for the true aim and purpose of his descent: “to look in the night at what night, the *other* night, the dissimulation that appears.”¹⁰⁶

If we follow Blanchot, in order for the work to persist it must abandon the rules for success in the light and experience a necessary failure; that is, it must embrace the obscure. It is precisely the night, where the artist is undermined, that is the object of the work. This is why the work protects itself by saying to Orpheus, “You will keep me only if you keep from looking at *her*. But that forbidden movement is precisely what Orpheus must accomplish in order to carry

¹⁰⁴ Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 172.

¹⁰⁵ Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 172.

¹⁰⁶ Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 172. Emphasis original.

the work beyond what assures it.”¹⁰⁷ There is a similar movement that takes place with our communal exposure to the impossible and the impossibility of a ‘work’ — of an origin — that results from it. With the experience of a necessary failure, the ‘looking back’, for us as with Orpheus, “there remains only, as compensation, the work’s uncertainty, for is there ever a work?”¹⁰⁸ Our struggle with the aporias of death is what produces the work: the unexperienced experience which attempts to ‘look in the night at what the night hides’. It is by embracing the obscure that an excess is possible that reveals the unknown as unknown and allows us, too, to go beyond what assures it. The essence of the work is precisely to evade any essential characterization or stability, it is something that is always to be *rediscovered* and *recreated*. There is an impermanence that exists which does not allow for a fixed meaning by being attached to something outside, to something that might be permanent or real, a true essence. The absence of meaning for Blanchot is what compels us to strive for interpretations, but is also what keeps us from finding what might be called a true meaning and what is left is an unworkability.

When calls for the dissipation of identity and its politics are made, the power of ‘looking back’ and the pervasiveness of the grip that history has on our present are often underestimated. One of the strongest tools of strategies like Butler’s dialectical thinking and the reclaiming of stigma is that it sees the grip of such identity-bound histories on subjectivities in its attempts to re-tool them. In this way, too, my attempts here at employing an inventiveness and freeing the processes of becoming towards new relationalities must include an address of this problematic. If it is the recognition of certain identities from the past and the roles we perform for them that has such a powerful effect on our present, then we need to address what that recognition is and the way it reaffirms our conception of identity. Our current way of seeing ourselves is determined by

¹⁰⁷ Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 174.

¹⁰⁸ Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 174.

a mode of recognition that has us recognizing concretized identities from the past. What I seek is a different mode of recognition — if we can still call it that — that offers a fragmenting of the past, an unworkability that obscures rather than makes clear. A way of looking at the past that necessitates failure and allows the unknown to work as unknown where a ruinous gaze is not seen as an unfaithful or untruthful project, but as necessary.

A ruinous gaze set on the past would expose the obscurity of historical identities and serve to recognize, in a way, ruined identities rather than the totalized and concretized notions that we seek to (re)employ in the present. By letting the unknown work as unknown, rather than attempting to comprehend and master it, we can change the way that history works in us and on understandings of identity in terms of an identification with the past. Foucault speaks to this form of effective history in his essay “The Lives of Infamous Men,” where he comments on his interaction with the prison archives of the Bastille and the *Hôpital général* while conducting his research. Here, Foucault places the lives of obscure men alongside contemporary readers, whose only connection is a hospital record or record of incarceration. Foucault’s emphasis here is on the process of historical discovery and the contingent nature of the interactions between history’s subjects, those who study them, and the knowledge that is drawn from them. Remarking that there is no necessary connection between those who study history — that is, contemporaries — and the subjects of history that they study, Foucault concerns himself with the ‘unimportant men’ that have no existence or importance outside of the records we might find them in. “The power that watched these lives, that pursued them, that lent its attention, if only for a moment, to their complaints and their little racket, and marked them with its claw was what gave rise to the few words about them that remain for us...”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Michel Foucault, “The Lives of Infamous Men,” in *The Essential Works of Foucault: Vol. 3: Power*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2001), 161.

The individuals that exist as historical records exist for us today, and existed then, as power relations. That is, they are constituted by their interaction with discursive regimes and power relations that they came into contact with. “Would anything at all remain of what [these individuals] were in their violence or in their singular misfortune had they not, at a given moment, met up with power and provoked its forces?” Foucault asks.¹¹⁰ Emphasizing the importance of a genealogical approach, we can here see the importance of the ways in which we look at those figures and events of history and the way we gaze upon present traumas and the processes of memory building. What are we concretizing and memorializing in the present, to be reflected upon as history, but certain understandings of power relations. For Foucault, the individuals of the Bastille and the *Hôpital général* are and were criminals or mad, “infamous,” by in a strictly discursive (i.e. power relations) sense: “they no longer exist except through the terrible words that were destined to render them forever unworthy of the memory of men ... they are no longer anything but that which was meant to crush them — neither more nor less.”¹¹¹

What is interesting for me here is that Foucault is not concerned with a recovery of the individuals lost in history, a determination of who these individuals ‘really were,’ but with the ways in which they evade history and obscure our attempts at defining them. We can compare the failure of this historical project with the attempts made by Orpheus to recover Eurydice. Blanchot’s reading of Orpheus dooms the project of recovery, of rescuing, to failure: by looking back he betrays Eurydice but not to look back would be a betrayal as well. Not only can the dead not be brought back to life, but a failure to fail in such endeavors would itself be a betrayal. It is my suggestion that the Orphic world/gaze can be employed as one possibility for a re-imagining of the past and as an alternative form of relationality and subjectivity. The images Orpheus

¹¹⁰ Foucault, “The Lives of Infamous Men,” 161.

¹¹¹ Foucault, “The Lives of Infamous Men,” 164.

suggest do not offer a mode of living nor attempt to teach any moral message but are instead committed to the undermining of such images and the exploding of the dialectical cultural images they come in contact with. The Orphic image is a way of disseminating a refusal and making it more productive: rather than one, dialectical refusal, we have multiple, endless refusals obscuring dominant social images that might lead to a new politics: a politics of failure.

History is filled with abjected subjectivities constructed by the gaze of dominant social regimes; a new, Orphic politics is one way in which, I believe, we could ruin such a gaze without remaining inside of it or merely replacing one mode of living with another. A politics of failure is way towards new modes of relating to the past that does not demand — indeed prevents — a personal identification with events of the past. Rather, it offers an impersonal past that obscures attempts at comprehension and mastery, leaving the unknown to work as unknown in ways that lead to an impersonal relationality. A relationality in which we are not connected by the contingent and provisional distinctions of identity, but by processes of becoming. This impersonal relationality is not the elimination of memory but a re-imagining of what is to be remembered: not a truth about an other or about the self, but the never ceasing processes of becoming in terms of relations and of others themselves.

CHAPTER NINE:
Can Anything be Rescued by Defending It?: A Survivor's Response to Sacrifice

For their service and sacrifice, warm words of thanks from a grateful nation are more than warranted, but they aren't nearly enough ... We have a sacred trust with those who wear the uniform of the United States of America. It's a commitment that begins at enlistment, and it must never end.

-President Barack Obama

As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.

- President John F. Kennedy

We are often told that military heroes are forged through the sacrifices they make on the battlefield and that these sacrifices demand a repayment from the broader public. In this chapter I interrogate contemporary ethical relationships between those who have made sacrifices in military service and those who have survived the conflict. More specifically, I explore the act of self-sacrifice as a gift from those in combat to those fighting with them in the hopes that they might survive, and the elaboration of an ethical response from those survivors. A dominant discourse surrounding war veterans and those killed in conflict is one that implies a debt incurred by those the veterans served — the community or the nation: ‘thank you for your service’ is a common expression of such indebtedness and gratitude. In instances of ethical indebtedness, I ask, ‘What are the political implications of this indebtedness and what, exactly, is owed to “those who gave the ultimate gift” and to what the identifier represents?’

Questions such as these demand our attention because the ‘sacrifice/indebtedness’ economy of contemporary responses to those who lost their lives in military conflict is circular. Contemporary modes of repaying ‘the ultimate gift’ reinforces a need for civilians-turned-soldiers to replace Americans killed in military excursions and to continue a tradition of self-

sacrifice. In other words, the function of contemporary ethical responses to the sacrifices made by members of the military is one that repays and honors sacrifice by picking up the fight where they left off, creating the conditions of possibility for new sacrifices to be made and for more lives to be lost.

Survivors of military conflict and those who sacrifice their lives are generalized and objectified by contemporary discourses so that they are seen for *what* they are and not for *who* they are. When individuals are killed in war, families and communities respond to the loss of a unique and irreplaceable person. They are not mourning the loss of an abstract individual; it is not the death of *a* person they are grieving, but the death of *this* person. In the realm of politics, however, the singularity of any one person is not what matters. What matters is that people, generally, exist who can be the object of governance and administration, rather than as individuals with value as such. When it comes to how the American public and American political apparatus handle military deaths politically and rhetorically, the individual is represented largely as interchangeable, exchangeable, and substitutable.

This type of response, to employ a term by Jenny Edkins, misses the ‘person-as-such’; it misses the person in their singularity. “The person-as-such,’ Edkins reminds us, ‘can be approached only through paying attention to particular actions in particular places at particular times; the person-as-such is not generalizable.’¹ The concern with *what* someone is (soldier, hero, maker of the ultimate sacrifice, and so on) and not *who* someone is reinforces individuals as objects to be governed and administered.² The normalizing ethical responses of dominant discursive practices can, I argue, be disoriented and disrupted by prioritizing the person-as-such

¹ Jenny Edkins, *Missing: Persons and Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 194.

² See Edkins, *Missing: Persons and Politics*, 8-12.

– by the individual in all their singularity. In order to counter the politics of substitutability we must instead form a politics that responds to and with uniqueness rather than abstraction.

In examining the notion of self-sacrifice, of dying for an other, I draw on the conceptual framework of Emmanuel Levinas's and Jacques Derrida's work on the possibility of an ethical expression of gratitude. In the essay "At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am," Derrida's attempt at extending gratitude to Levinas for his work *succeeds only because he fails* in his intent to pay homage. It is through the idea of an ethical response formed through what is traditionally considered an ethical failure that I seek the implications of a politically and socially reinforced gratitude resulting from the act of self-sacrifice. I consider the role of the survivor, those who can be said to be the recipients of the gift of death/ life (giving you your life is the giving you my death), and the possibility of a resulting obligation. In this way, it is both members of the military that return from combat and the American public that I consider as survivors. Servicemen and woman are the more immediate recipients of the gift of sacrifice on the battlefield but civilians, too, are seen as the recipients of an enduring political culture and organization at the expense of lives lost in battle. How, then, are we — combat veterans and the American public alike — to express true gratitude and to respond ethically to those self-sacrificing individuals?

To explicate the exchange between Levinas and Derrida, I begin with an elaboration of Levinas' conception of ethical obligation and responsibility to others. After establishing the primary ethical concerns, my argument interrogates the function of self-sacrifice as a gift and the economy of gift-giving that comes with it, focusing on how it is that Derrida succeeds only through failure in his attempt to express gratitude to Levinas for his ethical work and the implications of this for an ethical response to the revered Other who sacrifices themselves on the battlefield. Turning to the soldier and the survivor, this paper offers accounts of practices that

divest individual soldiers of their uniqueness and singularity, practices that focus on the *what* and not the *who*, through a critical reading of the mass graves at Fromelles, France and the social role performed by the ‘war hero’. Ultimately, I argue that it is through what would traditionally be considered faulty expressions of gratitude that ethical responses can be reoriented in ways that prioritize *who* self-sacrificing individuals are over *what* they are and reduce the potential for more lives to be lost in military conflict.

Mass Graves and the Individual

How might a contemporary ethical response that offers to repay and honor sacrifice by picking up the fight where it left off be reoriented? As one possibility, a practical ethical response to those who sacrifice their lives in combat is a politics that attempts to recuperate the individual from the facelessness of governance and administration. We can look at the recovery of bodies from mass graves as a straightforward example of bringing the individual, the ‘person-as-such,’ back into politics.

In one of many instances seen throughout military history, those who died at the battle of Fromelles, France during World War I can be seen as those whose gift of sacrifice was subsumed under the banner of nationalism and appropriated in a blanketing gesture of heroism, rendering them objects to be utilized by governments, and not seen as singular lives, unique, and irreplaceable. The battle itself consisted of infantry from the 5th Australian Division and the British 61st Division attacking a section of heavily fortified German front line. Ultimately gaining no tactical or strategic advantage, Australian and British assaulters suffered massive casualties within minutes. As the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) puts it, “The action turned into a bloody catastrophe — the Australians had over 5,500 killed, wounded

and missing; [the British] 61st Division reported over 1,500 killed, wounded and missing...it remains the worst day in Australian military history.”³

The bodies of the British and Australian dead killed at Fromelles were interned in mass graves by the Germans following the battle, graves that remained unmarked and largely undiscovered by Australian and British governments for nearly a century. The sites of these mass graves were located due in large part to the work of independent researchers like Australian school-teacher Lambis Englezos and military historian Peter Barton. In addition to doing the research required to locate gravesites, individuals like Englezos did the work of convincing the Australian military to pursue an investigation into identifying the sites of other mass graves and the soldiers buried in them. Englezos’ efforts lead to the Pheasant Wood Military Cemetery near Fromelles in 2010, the first new military cemetery built by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission since the 1960s.

The objective behind the new cemetery was to recover and identify the bodies of those buried in mass graves outside of Fromelles in order to provide them with an individual military burial and an individualized gravestone. The CWGC identifies the following as their guiding principles: “Each of the dead should be commemorated by name on the headstone or memorial; Headstones and memorials should be permanent; Headstones should be uniform; There should be no distinction made on account of military or civil rank, race or creed.”⁴ The recovery of remains from mass graves does not change the fact that those individuals died in battle and are gone — it does not replace the void created by these deaths for the families and communities. What it does do is give this loss a name and face: it is no longer the collective loss of a military

³ “Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Military Cemetery,” Commonwealth War Graves Commission (2015), [webpage], Accessed November 15, 2015.

<http://www.tandfonline.com/action/authorSubmission?journalCode=smil20&page=instructions#.Vk6cUNDsclM>.

⁴ “Our Organisation,” Commonwealth War Graves Commission (2015), [webpage]. Accessed November 15, 2015. <http://www.cwgc.org/about-us/our-organisation.aspx>.

unit where certain numbers are dead, wounded, or MIA, identified by rank and serial number; the universalized loss of a nation; but the loss of the singular individual, recognized not for *what* they were but for *who* they were for families and communities.

Hero Narrative

Personal narratives express the uniqueness and singularity of our lives. The stories told by survivors of specific people in particular places at particular times, with accounts of what happened and where in specific detail, expose *who* we are in ways that move past *what* we are and get underneath the performativity of social roles. The roles people play serve to universalize and abstract: mother, brother, soldier does not speak to any one person, but to broadly normalized categories that any one person never quite exemplifies. One such role often assigned to survivors and to those who sacrifice their lives in military service is that of ‘hero’. The following examples are not going to address all experiences or *the* experience of the combat veteran, but are instead going to argue that personal stories matter in important ways that are often obfuscated by social roles.⁵

The label hero divests individuals of their singularity and places them in a role to be performed. The role of hero, where death is scripted as sacrifice, seems dismissive in its focus on procedure (‘heroic duty’ and the corresponding reverence for such duty) and not on individuals: the hero is an abstraction and easy interchangeable with other heroes. The hero is a character, a part to be played, and it does not refer to an individual as such. This universalization further obscures the individual we are trying to honor and praise by putting them in a role

⁵ See Jenny Edkins, *Missing: Persons and Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge, 2008); Ann Jones, *They Were Soldiers: How the Wounded Return from America's Wars: The Untold Story* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014).

characterized by stoicism: a silent sacrifice that stifles personal narrative and reinforces not the individual, but the normalized discourse of ‘soldier’ and ‘hero’.

If storytelling is the way in which we express the uniqueness of our lives, the silencing of personal narrative makes it harder for others to see the hero as an individual person with vulnerabilities and difficulties unique to their situation. This problem is glaringly evident with the high suicide rate among active duty soldiers and veterans, as well as the underreported – and so undertreated – instances of PTSD. The U.S. has a powerful history of combat veterans coming forward with their personal experience of war trauma and the effects of returning home as a ‘hero.’ David Finkel’s *Thank You for Your Service* highlights some of these accounts from the ongoing War on Terror and the counter-narratives they offer to the expectations of the discursive hero. One soldier, Tausolo Aieti, offers his story and the difficulty he has had reconciling the hero role that is ascribed to him and the lived experience of his mental, physical, and emotional scars.

“I don’t know if everyone knows your story, but you are all fortunate – because this is a hero,” a psychologist says of Aieti to an audience of family and friends at a graduation from a PTSD treatment program.⁶ Tausolo’s journey to this particular treatment program began when his HMMWV (Humvee) ran over an IED in Baghdad. Surviving the initial blast, Tausolo hobbles back to the vehicle on a broken leg and pulls two soldiers from the wreckage, saving their lives. The Humvee now bursting into flames, Tausolo realizes that the driver, James Harrelson, was still inside: “I looked over and all I could see was flames and the outline of a body,” he says.⁷ It is this image of the person he failed save that returns to Tausolo in his

⁶ David Finkel, *Thank You for Your Service* (New York: Sarah Crichton Books, 2013), 35.

⁷ Finkel, *Thank You for Your Service*, 38.

nightmares and sometimes as daytime apparitions, the image of his fellow soldier “Harrelson, on fire, asking him, ‘Why didn’t you save me?’”⁸

“A hero isn’t someone who doesn’t feel fear, they’re someone who in spite of their fear does the right thing and really risks their own safety,” the psychologist continues, “... and I hope you hold on to that as you leave here, because you have an opportunity to go back and to your family be a hero everyday.”⁹ Finkel outlays Tausolo’s daily struggle with violent outbursts, depression, anger, hypervigilance, a spouse who is constantly worried that he might hurt her or himself, and his worries that fellow soldiers will see him as weak. Tausolo certainly did not feel like a hero.

Finkel’s exposition of the ‘after-war’ shows the lingering effect of combat trauma on veterans, families, and communities. The dwelling in traumatic moment(s) that has taken over the lives of many suffering from PTSD and their families is something that the American public needs to struggle with, especially given the open/closed narrative so pervasive in common discourse: the soldier returned, their war is over; traumatized veterans get treatment, we have done what we can, now your on your own; you went, you came back. Good luck and thank you for your service. The rhetorical trope of ‘hero’ continues after combat on the military side as well, where returning combat veterans who are seeking treatment for PTSD are assessed by the ‘Warrior Screening Matrix’ and are assigned to ‘Warrior Transition Battalions,’ reinforcing the warrior/hero take on service members returning from combat.

The discursive ‘hero’ prioritizes governance and normalization over the individual by emphasizing political roles over singularities. The role performed by the hero is one imbued with a stoic resilience, where what ‘happened over there’ is not talked about but dealt with through

⁸ Finkel, *Thank You for Your Service*, 38.

⁹ Finkel, *Thank You for Your Service*, 37.

solemn and private reflection. Part of their sacrifice is not only the risking of their lives but the demonstration of strength by suffering through what they must have seen and done without the need of assistance. The hero is strong and silent. Setting heroes outside of the normal and the everyday, we tell ourselves and each other that we could not possibly comprehend what happens over there anyway, that we could not imagine the things they have seen and the risks they have taken. But we, the broader public, can imagine. If we focused on the individual's experience and their narration of that experience, if we get away from the language of heroism, the singularity of unique experiences would emerge through universalizing and normalizing roles assigned to the 'hero'. Performing the role of 'hero' dismisses the experiences, the fear, the doubt, the monotony, the heart pounding, the anger, the camaraderie, and the cohesiveness. It dismisses, in short, the person.

The Gift of Sacrifice

Indebtedness to veterans stems from the sacrifices that they make — their time spent in war zones, their family life, their physical and/or mental well-being, or their very lives — and the benefits that we receive (perceived, implied, or otherwise) from such acts. Such indebtedness is seen as the result of benefits received from the sacrifice of others and that this gift demands a responsibility to those who sacrificed. The image commonly associated with sacrifice in war is the act of risking one's wellbeing in combat — putting one's life on the line so that others might survive the battle. Salvatore Giunta's experience, which earned him the title of first living Medal of Honor recipient since the Vietnam War, fits this narrative of sacrifice.

Described by President Obama as “a soldier as humble as he is heroic,”¹⁰ Sal was on patrol in Afghanistan when his unit was ambushed. Charging through the initial volley of enemy

¹⁰ “Remarks by the President in Awarding the Medal of Honor to Staff Sergeant Salvatore A. Giunta” [press release], The White House, Office of the Press Secretary (2010). Accessed March 29, 2016.

gunfire that was so close to the patrol that air support could not engage for fear of friendly fire, Sal rushed to the aid of a wounded soldier, pulling him behind cover. Though struck twice in this effort, Sal continued the counterattack, fighting towards two other wounded Americans. As he pushed forward, Sal saw two enemy combatants carrying a wounded American away and, under relentless enemy fire, he pursued. Sal sprinted towards his fellow soldier while engaging the enemy, killing one and wounding the other, who ran off. Sal kept his friend alive for nearly thirty minutes until the MEDEVAC helicopter arrived to pick him up. He and his unit then continued on with the mission. “All of [‘our brave servicemen and women’],” President Obama continues, “deserve our enduring thanks and gratitude . . . They are why our banner still waves, our founding principles still shine, and our country, the United States of America, still stands as a force for good all over the world.”¹¹

Of course, sacrifices made in combat do not need to be something as flashy or extreme as Sal Giunta’s story. For many service members, the sacrifices they make are found in a lingering struggle to reconcile their personal experience with war and the persistence of moral injury. Nancy Sherman’s *Afterwar* expands understandings of *jus post bellum* beyond simply bringing an end to armed conflict and describes in great detail the moral struggles that war veterans continue to face long after their return home. Moral injury, Sherman states, “refers to experiences of serious inner conflict arising from what one takes to be grievous moral transgressions that can overwhelm one’s sense of goodness and humanity.”¹²

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/11/16/remarks-president-awarding-medal-honor-staff-sergeant-salvatore-a-giunta>

¹¹ “Remarks by the President,” The White House, Office of the Press Secretary (2010).

¹² Nancy Sherman, *Afterwar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 8.

Moral injury has less to do with specific transgressive acts than with “a generalized sense of falling short of moral and normative standards befitting good persons and good soldiers.”¹³ Sherman points out that there is no one type of moral injury as the nature and extent of the injury is determined by subjective and individual experiences: who an individual was before the war, their personal experience during war, and their experience upon returning home. It might take the form of resentment towards civilians who take the costs of war lightly; the thought that one could have done more to save the lives of their troops in combat; a sense of shame and betrayal in fighting what one believes to be an unjust war; the guilt of taking lives, regardless of the cause.

In *Given Time*, Derrida problematizes gift giving in important ways for our consideration here of the act of self-sacrifice — in its very possibility — and what such an act might mean for the possibility of, or the demand for, reciprocity. In suggesting that the conditions of possibility for a gift are at the same time the conditions of its impossibility, Derrida asserts that the very notion of giving implies a demand that a pure or genuine gift must reside outside the economy of traditional giving and taking as well as beyond any personal gain or utility.¹⁴ A gift cannot appear as such because the gift is destroyed by anything that would be recompense, a returned equivalence, or even an acknowledgment: a gift in the purest sense requires that there be no “reciprocity, return, exchange, countergift, or debt. If the other *gives* me *back* or *owes* me or has to give me back what I give him or her, there will not have been a gift...”¹⁵ Even by responding with a ‘thank you’, the gift is appropriated by the cycle of giving and taking, where the act of acknowledgement is a presumed repayment of debt.

This economy of gifting, the acts of giving and receiving, associates the gift with some conception of a proper response – an imposition or indebtedness on the receiver – or even an

¹³ Sherman, *Afterwar*, 8.

¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 30.

¹⁵ Derrida, *Given Time*, 12. Emphasis original.

opportunity for the giver to simply be recognized as the giver. Even acknowledgment of the gift from the giver would mean a repurposing of the gift for personal gain, as a gesture of social status or even as an unspoken pat on the back.¹⁶ If the very intention of giving suffices to make a return payment to oneself, then the gift must include neither the apprehension of the deed being done nor an acknowledgement by the beneficiaries of the act. We cannot consider the gift, Derrida suggests, without considering its relation to an economy (or *the* economy), without consideration of the giving and taking being presented.¹⁷ He argues that because the pure gift must reside outside the circular logic of any economy – outside the awareness of the gift by the giver and receiver – the actuality of any gift is rendered an impossibility.¹⁸

On April 21, 2007 Captain Josh Mantz, then Scout Platoon leader in the Army's 1-8 Cavalry, suffered a severed femoral artery after his unit came under sniper fire near Sadr City, Iraq and was assumed dead after flatlining for fifteen minutes. Even though Josh miraculously came back to life and even resumed command of his unit five months after the incident, he crashed emotionally four years later, racked with guilt over the fact that he survived the attack and others had not. "It's the moral injury over time that really kills people," Mantz said. "Soldiers lose their identity. They don't understand who they are anymore" ... "Most people don't appreciate the awful weight of that moral injury."¹⁹

In this instance, someone who survived combat feels guilty about their survival and feels that something is owed to those who did not survive. He has received the gift of life at the expense (real or apparent) of the lives of his fellow soldiers and a debt has been incurred. As an

¹⁶ Derrida, *Given Time*, 14.

¹⁷ Derrida, *Given Time*, 7.

¹⁸ There are, of course, many critiques of Derrida's position of gift giving; without fully developing these arguments here, it is worth mentioning such criticisms for consideration in the argument I put forth. One line of critique assigns flaw to Derrida's position on the basis of purity of intent in gift giving, the idea being that purity of the gift is assured by intention. Another major critique of Derrida's ideas concerning a gift giving economy is that it is too wrapped up in notions of economy, meaning Western, capitalist conceptions of the gift.

¹⁹ Quoted in Sherman, *Afterwar*, 7.

individual, how is Josh to repay this debt and, in the broader picture, how is the American public to respond to the gift of sacrifice made by service members in the form of physical and moral injury? It is with Derrida's critique of gift/repayment in mind that I address the sacrifice/response dynamic, arguing that the gift of sacrifice and the response that repays the debt of sacrifice by creating the possibilities for more sacrifices to be made remains within the circular logic of a closed economy. Through the discussion of Derrida's engagement with Levinas to follow, I will build on this critique to problematize continued sacrifice as a repayment for sacrifice and offer instead a mode of expressing gratitude that is intentionally guided by attempts at failure.

Ethical Imperatives

Healing the physical, emotional, and moral wounds of veterans is the responsibility of every person, not simply a task for government institutions. A response to sacrifice takes the form of a shared moral engagement at the individual level among both civilians and the military. In Sebastian Junger's book *War*, the product of fifteen months spent embedded with an American infantry unit in Afghanistan, we are offered a candid glimpse into the role of sacrifice in combat. As a journalist living alongside Battle Company, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team in a remote outpost in Afghanistan, Junger went out on combat patrols and witnessed first hand the act of a soldier's sacrifice on many occasions. What he witnessed were first-hand accounts of sacrifice that were constructed around contingency and singularity: unique reactions made by particular people in response to particular situations. Through first-hand experience and interviews, Junger was interested in interrogating the function that sacrifice played with the soldiers around him. He found that, "[a]s a soldier, the

thing you were most scared of was failing your brothers when they needed you, and compared to that, dying was easy. Dying was over with.”²⁰

Soldiers were not concerned with fulfilling the social roles civilians usually attribute to them; roles defined by romantic notions of heroism and bravery. One soldier, Army Specialist Sterling Jones, says

I’m not doing this for recognition from my country, I’m not doing this so that somebody goes ‘wow, those guys are really patriotic – those guys are really brave.’ Truthfully, I could give a shit what anybody thinks except for those guys to my left and my right. Because that’s what it’s about. Those guys are what it’s about²¹

For those fighting alongside each other, the prospect of losing the person standing next to them became more upsetting than the possibility of losing their own life. The perceived indebtedness to veterans that stems from the gift of sacrifice — an offering of one’s self to physical, mental, and moral injury on the battlefield — that might result in the continued life of the service-members fighting alongside them and an enduring political culture back home demands a responsibility or an expression of gratitude and a repayment of sorts. Derrida’s critique of the gift/repayment economy has important implications for our understanding of self-sacrifice as a function of gift-giving and our elaboration of an ethical response.

As John Milbank notes on giving in the work of Levinas and Derrida: “The only real gift, they claim, is one that expects no counter-gift in return. Unless a gift is in this fashion sacrificial—the giving up of something—it is argued, a gift reduces to a hidden contractual agreement, governed by a principle of self-interest; and actions out of self-interest, as Kant pointed out, are not pure gifts.”²² In seeking an other than self-interested response and an escape from the gifting economy, it is through the work of Emmanuel Levinas that I consider the

²⁰ Sebastian Junger, *War* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2011), 210.

²¹ Sebastian Junger (dir.), *Korengal*. (Gold Crest Films and Outpost Films, 2014). Documentary film.

²² John Milbank, “The Ethics of Self-Sacrifice in First Things.” *First Things* (1999) [online journal article]. <http://www.firstthings.com/article/1999/03/004-the-ethics-of-self-sacrifice>.

address of the Other, my response to an other that has always already addressed me and demands of me a response. It is through considerations of the ‘face,’ among other notions determined by Levinas, that I explain how these unprompted demands, demands we are unable to refuse, structure moral claims upon modes of address. Levinas is useful here because he gives us a way of thinking about the relationship between representation (through his notions of the ‘face’) and the precariousness of life.

For Levinas the face is not necessarily a human face but it is a condition for humanization; the face consists of a series of displacements and conveys meaning not through speaking in any linguistic sense, but rather the face “summons me, calls for me, begs for me, as if the invisible death that must be faced by the Other, pure otherness, separated, in some way, from any whole, were my business.”²³ The ‘face-to-face’ is an exposure to the vulnerability of the other that prioritizes ethics over any ontological endeavor: I am confronted with the possible death of another, an awareness of their vulnerability, and my preparedness to respond is called into question. Through this calling into question, the Other “becomes my neighbour precisely through the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question.”²⁴

A major theme in Levinas’ ethics is a critique of systematic violence in Western thought, which he believes to have hindered notions of hospitality and rendered it difficult to respect others. For Levinas ethics is precisely the ‘calling into question of the same’, something that cannot be accomplished with the reduction and appropriation of the Other for the needs of one’s own ego. “The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as

²³ Emmanuel Levinas, “Ethics as First Philosophy,” in *The Levinas Reader* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1989), 83.

²⁴ Levinas, “Ethics as First Philosophy,” 83.

ethics. Metaphysics, transcendence, the welcoming of the other by the same, of the Other by me, is concretely produced as the calling into question of the same by the other, that is, as the ethics that accomplishes the critical essence of knowledge.”²⁵ Ethics, then, is not the judgment of others, but an evaluation — a calling into question — of oneself.

Levinas’ project could be described as the attempt at overturning the ontological prioritization of the ego in efforts to make ethics the ‘first philosophy’. For Levinas, philosophy must begin with the face of the other who is knocking on the door, where “the alterity of the other places me immediately under the obligation of hospitality. I am no longer allowed to look through the peephole before opening the door: ‘[T]he other facing me makes me responsible for him/her, and this responsibility has no limits’.”²⁶ The primacy of ethics places an obligation to the other that comes before any knowledge or judgment about the other.²⁷ As Judith Butler notes, “[t]o respond to the face, to understand its meaning, means to be awake to what is precarious in another life, or rather, the precariousness of life itself.”²⁸ Levinas’ conception of the face situates us within the ethical claim that arises from the address always already made by an other. Such discourse, arriving unprompted, renders us ‘hostage’.²⁹

Important here is that the focus on the individual, on the *who* and not the *what*, is not a means of facilitating the appearance of the ‘real’ person once social roles are lifted. The

²⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 43.

²⁶ Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 29.

²⁷ Levinas: “The relations between the Other and me which dawns forth in his expression, issues neither in number nor in concept. The Other remains infinitely transcendent, infinitely foreign; his face in which his epiphany is produced and which appeals to me breaks with the world that is common to us, whose virtualities are inscribed in our *nature* and developed by our existence.” Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Interiority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 194. Emphasis original.

²⁸ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2004), 134.

²⁹ “[t]o respond to the face, to understand its meaning, means to be awake to what is precarious in another life, or rather, the precariousness of life itself” (Butler 2004: 134). Levinas’ conception of the face interrupts a narcissistic neoliberalism, instead situating us within the ethical claim of discourse that arises from the address always already made by the other; such discourse, arriving unprompted, renders us ‘hostage’ to the Other.

individualism Levinas has in mind is not the atomistic, ‘authentic’ individual of traditional liberalism and its focus on types, statuses, and roles such as the ‘citizen’ or, in our case, the ‘hero.’ It is the traditional liberal focus on the individual that serves to subject the uniqueness and singularity of an individual to universalizing categories that is the object of Levinas’ criticism. In what C. Fred Alford cautiously calls an ‘inverted liberalism,’ Levinas seeks to “foster and protect the individual because only the individual can see the tears of the other, the tears that even the just regime cannot see. The individual is to be fostered and protected for the sake of the other individual.”³⁰

The individual is important for ethics because it only the individual, not State institutions, that can see the Other. “There are, if you like, the tears that a civil servant cannot see: the tears of the Other,” Levinas tells us, and that “The I alone can perceive the ‘secret tears’ of the Other, which are caused by the functioning — albeit reasonable — of the [liberal institutional] hierarchy.”³¹ When individuals are abstracted through discursive and institutional practices, they function on the substitutable and exchangeable level of the *what* and cannot see the demands made by the Other and so cannot devote themselves to their service. The individual is emphasized in this context not so they can express themselves and protect their own autonomous self-interests. “What has changed,” Alford elaborates, “is the meaning and purpose of individual existence: not to serve or express oneself, but to serve others.”^{32,33}

³⁰ C. Fred Alford, “Levinas and political theory,” *Political Theory* 32(2) (2004): 146.

³¹ Levinas quoted in Alford, “Levinas and political theory,” 155.

³² Alford, “Levinas and political theory,” 168.

³³ Since an individual’s ethical ‘saying’ extends to all possible Others, ‘the Third’ — or ‘other Others’ — necessitates that ethical responsibility be extended into the realm of the ‘said’, that is, into language, justice, and politics. For Levinas, ethics and justice exist in both relation and separation, where neither is reducible to the other. Thus, justice cannot diminish the concrete, infinite, and asymmetrical responsibility for the Other, and ethical responsibility retains its potency. In this extension, the Third also limits the responsibility for the Other in forcing one to choose between Others. Since it is not possible to respond infinitely to all possible Others in the realm of politics, the original responsibility remains, though it cannot be fulfilled through institutions. In his regard, justice and politics are, for Levinas, inherently violent and unethical. While Levinas is deeply suspicious of political

Junger found something similar to this being held hostage in the men of the 173rd, but not in the way that is typically represented by the language of honor and duty. What he found in the combat soldiers' devotion to one another was something more than the fulfillment of a duty with its implications of an unwanted obligation. 'The willingness to die for another person,' he says, 'is a form of love that even religion fails to inspire, and the experience of it changes a person profoundly.'³⁴ Commenting on research conducted by the Army Research Branch during WWII and their published study, *The American Soldier: Combat and Its Aftermath*, Junger notes that what the Army sociologists "slowly came to understand was that courage *was* love."³⁵ Solidarity and camaraderie, and not self-preservation nor abstract ideals, was the primary motivation for soldiers in combat during WWII. The same thing was taking place in the modern War on Terror: it was not notions of courage, patriotism, or duty-bound obligation, but solidarity that held soldiers together.

Faulty Thanks

I have made the claim that contemporary responses to veterans in addressing the sacrifices they have made fall short of an adequate response. So what are they not receiving? Contemporary responses are what Levinas would consider a return of the Same, a return of the sacrifice that was gifted to begin with. Additionally, responses that emphasize the *what* over the *who* also return what the survivors already possess – the indebtedness and reverence, the 'never-ending commitment' towards service members. These modes of response remain within a closed

thought, his ethics is not apolitical. In order to address the problems of 'the Third', what is required is an oscillation between ethics and politics, a moderation of each by the other, because ethics requires politics. For a fuller discussion of Levinas and 'the Third', see William Paul Simmons, "The Third: Levinas' theoretical move from anarchical ethics to the realm of justice and politics," in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 25(6): 83-104; Adriaan Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1993), especially p. 166–84; and Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 188–247.

³⁴ Junger, *War*, 239.

³⁵ Junger, *War*, 239.

economy of give and take that perpetuates a political/ethical disposition that creates the conditions of possibility for new sacrifices to be made and thus more lives to be lost.

Derrida's complication of the act of giving requires that we view any gift — such as the gift of sacrifice — within the framework of a giving/receiving economy. In light of this critique we can problematize an extension of the gift — gratitude — and the implications for an economy of gifting sacrifice and repaying by responding to what this sacrifice was. In an essay written on Levinas after his death, “At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am,” Derrida discusses his debt to Levinas and considers the possibility of repayment, or what an appropriate response to Levinas could even be. Throughout the essay, Derrida considers the overwhelming obligation to respond both adequately and in a manner that would demonstrate gratitude. Importantly, Derrida is attempting to respond to Levinas' own ethical imperative; to the primordial obligation of the self to respond to the Other, to “open the door of the ego to the Other.”³⁶ In his attempt to give thanks for this ethical reminder that Levinas left us with, Derrida faces a paradox that problematizes his ability to simply say ‘thank you’ and be ‘grateful’.

Derrida reminds us that the giving of oneself to the Other (the Saying) is something that “escapes from the *circle of restitution* of the rendezvous,”³⁷ meaning that the face-to-face encounter is not something that can be returned or restituted to the self in order to understand it and own it. If Derrida wishes to pay homage to Levinas by affirming the value of his ethical work, he cannot simply say thank you. To do so would not only make the assumption that he had understood Levinas' work completely and correctly, but it would simply return to Levinas that which is already his. By saying ‘thanks’ Derrida remains within the economy of giving and taking and would have annulled further obligation on his part — his debt being paid. Such

³⁶ See Jacques Derrida, “At This Very Moment in the Work Here I Am,” Chapter 7 in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, Vol. I (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 11.

³⁷ Derrida, “At This Very Moment in the Work Here I Am,” 13. Emphasis original.

reciprocity, however, betrays the Levinasian imperative that requires a response of eternal obligation that lies outside such a circular economy. If Derrida's response is to be ethical, then, he must attempt to give thanks in a manner that celebrates Levinas' ethical imperatives without betraying them at the same time. He must elude the return of the same: he must not give in homage to Levinas a work which simply repeats what Levinas has already given us himself.

Derrida proceeds, in what he believes to be the only ethical manner, to write a 'faulty' thanks, believing that only in giving a faulty thanks — by maintaining an ingratitude — can ethical Saying be maintained. Arguing that "if the giving of thanks were 'faultless,' it would simply celebrate the Said of Levinas's text, affronting Levinas's idea that the ethical relation is 'beyond' knowledge by claiming, in fact, to know and like Levinas's work."^{38,39} Derrida believes that by responding with thanks he is only returning property to Levinas and is therefore giving no thanks at all but, by responding with faulty thanks, he is attempting to avoid a return of the Same. "Beyond any possible restitution," Derrida tells us, "there would be need for my gesture to operate without debt, in absolute ingratitude. The trap is that I then pay homage, the only possible homage, to his work, to what his work says of the Work."⁴⁰

Derrida's purposive failure is not a resignation ('it is impossible, so why bother') but a response to the demand to undertake ethical work. Critical here is that the impossibility of responding with adequate gratitude drives ethics. To express ethical gratitude he must show how Levinas' text fails and how he himself fails to return adequate thanks. Derrida succeeds only through failure. Put into conversation with the soldier, by *not* responding to soldiers in ways that

³⁸ Miriam Bankovsky, "A Thread of Knots: Jacques Derrida's Homage to Emmanuel Levinas' Ethical Reminder," *Invisible Culture: An Electronic Journal for Visual Studies*, issue 8 (2004). URL: https://www.rochester.edu/in_visible_culture/Issue_8/bankovsky.html.

³⁹ Derrida's thanks is faulty in two ways: it first 'misdirects' the thanks by not offering thanks directly to Levinas; in doing so, Derrida believes he is no longer responding to the obligation of the original gift. Second, by not simply repeating Levinas but offering criticism and improvement, Derrida maintains a 'ungrateful' thanks which does not return to Levinas that which was already his.

⁴⁰ Derrida, "At This Very Moment in the Work Here I Am," 13.

reinforce the discursive hero, we are not failing in our obligation to adequately respond to their sacrifice. The response instead becomes an undertaking that seeks to address the needs of the individual and not the universalized social role of hero. In other words, if we cannot address the discursive hero with predetermined responses, we must seek out and respond to the demands of each individual.

Taking from the theoretical implications of Derrida's ethics through failure, we can start to piece together a change in discourse and how we might approach the conversation about what it means to form an ethical response. To give a faulty expression of gratitude, to not return to the soldier what they have already given, is to get beneath ethical devices that maintain a sacrifice at the abstracted, universal level and focus specifically on the time, place, and person at hand. In doing so, we may find a way out of the closed gift/indebtedness economy.

Conclusion

To his surprise, Junger found that many of the soldiers he was embedded with missed being in Afghanistan after their combat rotations were over. Many stated they would go back tomorrow if they could. What soldiers mean when they make such comments is not that they miss combat, he tells us, "it's not that they actually miss getting shot at — you'd have to be deranged — it's that they miss being in a world where everything is important and nothing is taken for granted. They miss being in a world where human relations are entirely governed by whether you can trust the other person with your life ... The only thing that matters is your level of dedication to the rest of the group."⁴¹

What the soldiers longed for was the care of another that they came across in their deployments — the willingness to sacrifice one's self for every singular other that was a demonstration of care for the precariousness of life. "The thing that existed at Restrepo [the

⁴¹ Junger, *War*, 233-34.

outpost where they were stationed] but was virtually impossible to find back home wasn't so much combat as brotherhood."⁴² At home in the United States, very little seemed at stake because the precarity of each individual was taken for granted and talked around, rather than actively promoted and protected, in political discourse.⁴³

It is ethics as failure that I see as having potential for modifying contemporary responses to military sacrifice and the forms that gratitude might take. Traditional responses uphold the sacrifices made and offers in return that same sacrifice in the form of new citizens-turned-soldiers willing to sacrifice themselves. An intentional failure as the disruption of traditional ethical responses seeks as an expression of gratitude the return something other than sacrifice itself.

If we are to get away from a politics that take the individual and re-presents them as an abstraction, the American public and military alike must reorient discursive practices around a solidarity based on the singularity of other people. We must engage the violence and trauma of war in ways that facilitate, rather than divest us of, meaningful solidarity with contingency and singularity. Putting an ethical response to sacrifice into political forms requires a shared engagement by the broader public and military institutions, putting them into conversation with service members and responding to the *who* in their experiences with war violence. This is often easier said than done, especially when attempting to avoid prescribing responses so as to remain faithful to contingency, spontaneity, and singularity. A response oriented around what any

⁴² Junger, *War*, 275.

⁴³ See Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2010); George Saunders, "Home," *The New Yorker*, June 13 & 20 (2011); Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011).

particular person might need — to learn to walk, to learn to trust, to learn to forgive, and so on — is not intended to provide any universal lessons to follow.

The lack of generalizable lessons does not need to result in stagnation or paralysis: even without such prescriptions, we are left with an ethics of infinite responsibility and, at the same time, a politics that acknowledges its own failures and dangers. The political dangers of a stagnant, closed discursive economy call for political invention made in the name of the other where politics becomes, as Simon Critchley puts it, “*the art of a response to the singular demand of the other*, a demand that arises in a particular context — although the infinite demand cannot simply be reduced to its context — and calls for political invention, for creation.”⁴⁴ Foucault reminds us that

Our goal should be to rethink the social relationships between individuals and violence and to consider conditions of possibility that allow for a politics where violence is less possible and the precarity of lives more available. A politics that is comprised of a critical reflexivity that, as Foucault puts it, is to be ‘conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them’⁴⁵

Service members have come to be defined by *what* they are — by the roles they play in the social order of things. This order of ethical understanding can be challenged and disoriented by creating and elaborating practices previously unintelligible in our experiences with self-sacrifice. By focusing on the particulars of those who sacrifice their lives in combat we can reconfigure our experience with military deaths. A shared engagement by the American public and military institutions alike can resist appropriation by abstracting and normalizing discursive practices, instead demanding that they be seen as unique individuals with vulnerabilities and difficulties unique to their situation. In doing so, we might move away from the closed gift/indebtedness economy of contemporary ethical responses to the sacrifices made by members of the military

⁴⁴ Simon Critchley, “Five Problems in Levinas's View of Politics and the Sketch of a Solution to Them,” *Political Theory* 32(2) (2004): 178. Emphasis original.

⁴⁵ Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” in *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 50.

and express gratitude to them in what would traditionally be considered 'faulty' ways. Ethical responses that, instead of creating conditions of possibility for new sacrifices to be made and for more lives to be lost in attempts at shoring up an identity politics that surrounds American service members, serves to facilitate a shared commitment to the singularity and precariousness of life.

CHAPTER TEN:
Queering the War Dead: Gold Star Families and the Politics of Estrangement

The future Foucault envisages for us is not exclusively or categorically gay. But it is definitely queer.
— David Halperin, *Saint Foucault*

In the United States, there is a right and a wrong way to mourn lives lost to war violence. A successful mourning process incorporates the heroism and sacrifice of the war dead, foregrounding a specifically American brand of virtue that is demonstrated in the act of (ostensibly) dying for American values. To not ascribe the bodies of war dead with the honor demanded when one ‘gives the ultimate gift,’ on the other hand, is seen as a betrayal of their sacrifice and as an ethical failure. In this paper, I will interrogate the relationship between practices of mourning individuals killed by war violence and the identity politics these practices necessitate. Through a critical reading of Gold Star Families, I argue that the ‘successful’ mourning of Americans killed in combat is popularly articulated by practices that concretize a specifically American identity of the war dead which reaffirms notions of militarized redemptive violence in the preservation of those identities. In other words, I argue that the social norms acting as guideposts for processes of mourning the war dead over-determine relationships and identities in ways that perpetuate violence that is seen as redemptive.

Towards the development of new relational modes, I offer a queering of the war dead in efforts to retheorize the role of failure in mourning and to unwork over-determined identities. Arguing that dominant practices of grieving the war dead are excessively rigid and effectively

solidify notions of group interest and national identity, I see the identity politics in play as positing American lives as more grievable than non-American lives. The essentialization of American lives over others is the extension of an us/them dichotomy that not only justifies but also expects violence in response to perceived attacks on the American identity. If American lives are more grievable, and so more valuable, then the United States is justified in its use of military campaigns, discriminatory domestic policies, and torture in efforts made to uphold the way American citizens see themselves.

A recent and highly publicized speech at the Democratic National Convention by Gold Star Father Khizr Khan sheds light on this practice in telling ways: in grieving his son on the national stage and defending his son's honor against claims made by then Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump that all Muslims should be banned from the United States,¹ Khan insists that his son, a Muslim soldier in the U.S. Army killed in Iraq, be accepted into the fold of dominant practices and be recognized as an American war hero. Khan is not calling for an end to war violence or speaking out against the atrocities of war, but is instead insisting that his son be 'successfully mourned' in a manner befitting all good patriots. In suggesting, "If it were up to Donald Trump, he [his son] would have never been in America,"² Khan is arguing that Muslims, too, can be a legitimate part of the American war effort and deserve the accolades found therein. Khan does not question why his son is in Iraq to begin with (because he was,

¹ Jenna Johnson, "Trump calls for 'total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States'," *The Washington Post* (December 7, 2015). (website) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/12/07/donald-trump-calls-for-total-and-complete-shutdown-of-muslims-entering-the-united-states/>

² Khizr Khan, (speech, Philadelphia, PA, July 28, 2016), *Philly Voice*, <http://www.phillyvoice.com/transcript-khizr-m-khans-speech-democratic-national-convention/>.

unquestionably, fulfilling his patriotic duty and upholding American values³), but only why Trump and other Americans have not accepted his son as a successful portrait of the American dream.

Normalized practices of grieving the war dead assert an identity politics that suppresses a queerness found in the presuppositions of those things that ‘go without saying.’ The American public, I argue, has to recreate and reimagine this queerness through practices of mourning those lost to war violence. To engender this estrangement from relational norms in mourning, I offer a queering of the war dead: the application of imaginative relational practices that undo the relationships we currently have with ourselves and with others. Queering here, following Judith Halberstam, refers to “nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time.”⁴ What follows is an account of queerness that fosters new relational modes, especially amongst those closest to us; those identities, like American war hero, that we might want to solidify the most. This analysis is important for developing practices that reimagine relationships with the war dead that lie outside the logics of heroic and redemptive violence.

The articulation of an estrangement from those practices found within the liberal imaginary and the production of a challenge to normalizing practices creates subcultural public spaces that contest dominant practices. These spaces, what José Muñoz refers to as ‘counterpublics,’ offer potential for the development of communities and relational chains organized around resistance to dominant public spheres.⁵ Practices of queering the war dead

³ See James King, “The Father Of A Muslim War Hero Has This To Say To Donald Trump,” *Vocativ* (December 8, 2015). <http://www.vocativ.com/259159/the-father-of-a-muslim-war-hero-has-this-to-say-to-donald-trump/>.

⁴ Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 6.

⁵ José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and The Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 146.

constitute such a counterpublic space where dominant, identity based norms are challenged in ways that facilitate a resistance to the proliferation of a militarized redemptive violence in the preservation of normalized identities.⁶

In the case of Khizr Khan and other instances of mourning war deaths, we can see that the goal of pragmatic identity politics is to be accepted by dominant practices, rather than interrogating what those practices are doing. In articulating a form of resistance to this mode of perpetuating of war violence, I seek to escape dominant understandings of what relationships in mourning are by retheorizing the role of failure in contemporary understandings of mourning the war dead. By reconsidering what it might mean to ‘fail’ to honor those service members killed overseas in the traditional sense, I argue the discomfort of a perceived betrayal takes on the form of subversive relational modes.

Failing Identities In Mourning

A role often assigned to survivors and to those killed in military service is that of ‘hero,’ where the hero is a character, a part to be played, and does not refer to an individual as such. The role of war hero locates ‘hero’ at the heart of one’s personal narrative and the foundation of their identity. Heroes are held in a higher regard in terms of respectability than others and there is a perceived duty-bound obligation to honor them appropriately.⁷ Military funerals, for example, are marked by modes of verbal and tactile communications that identify certain bodies as belonging to a certain privileged community and representative of certain ideals. The privileging logic particular to military funerals are reinforced through rhetoric and ceremonial form: the

⁶ See Samuel Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York: New York University Press, 2001) for additional insight into the role of counterpublics on dominant public spheres.

⁷ For more on the social role of ‘hero’ see David Finkel, *Thank You For Your Service* (New York: Sarah Crichton Books, 2013); Sebastian Junger, *War* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2011); George Saunders, “Home,” *The New Yorker*, June 13 & 20, 2011; Thomas Beaumont, “A Survivor’s Response to Sacrifice,” *Critical Military Studies*, 2016. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/23337486.2016.1215074>.

ways in which the war dead are talked about and remembered through eulogies and personal stories shared overwhelmingly emphasizes their military service over other aspects of their lives. The 21-gun salute, the passing of the flag to the widow, and the unique ceremonies of military tradition all represent ways of culturally identifying war heroes. The failure to properly grieve — the betrayal — that would accompany somehow not bestowing the war dead and wounded with a hero's honor, in contemporary practices, goes without saying.

To enact failure as intrinsic to the act of mourning itself is not simply the inversion of those dominant discursive practices that see heroes as demanding honor and praise and the betrayal of those expectations as shameful, to simply resignify them, but to reject the relationality of traditional mourning itself and a refusal of the social positioning that accompanies such practices. Under certain circumstances, the undoing that comes through failing to successfully mourn as the liberal imaginary defines it — the purposive failure of betrayal — might offer more creative and imaginative ways of finding meaning in war death. More specifically, intentionally failing to honor those service members killed in combat as 'war heroes' we can begin to create new relationships in mourning that refuse the violence of the us/them identity politics that surrounds the label.

By interrogating those assumptions that 'go without saying', we begin to move beneath the surface of familiar and comfortable relationships to the 'truth' of identities in mourning, exposing the problematic nature of current practices of grieving. The assumption of an identity politics that separates Americans from Others, the assumption of a redemptive quality to American violence, the heroic nature of the American military dead, among others, inform a comfort and a stability in one's understanding of who and what they are. The intentional failure

to uphold these assumptions introduces a critical uncertainty in thinking about our experiences and we create the possibility for new practices.

The alertness of discomfort, what Michel Foucault called its “hyper and pessimistic activism,”⁸ foregrounds the contingent and the singular that are often obfuscated not only in traumatic events, but in the processes of grieving those events as well. To practice grieving as the assertion of selfhood is to maintain identity categories and the epistemological claims that constitute them, effectively solidifying and essentializing understandings of identity. If, instead, the practices of identities in mourning can be viewed in their contingency as the decision to grieve in certain ways, identities in mourning can become about an undoing rather than an essentializing. Interrogating the assumptions of the traditional mourning process brings the decision to reconcile loss and to account for it in certain ways into view and highlights the potential for the formation of new relational modes.

“We must make the intelligible appear against a background of emptiness and deny its necessity,” Foucault tells us. “We must think that what exists is far from filling all possible spaces. To make a truly unavoidable challenge of the question: What can be played?”⁹ Put into this conversation with identities in mourning, I argue that by making the intelligible and comfortable practices of mourning visible by removing the necessity of concretized identities, we can see the problematic ways in which they operate. The understanding that identity is not the basis for grieving the war dead requires a certain risk: a risk for the individual and a risk for community. It requires the loss of the comfort found in reiterative practices of identity politics

⁸ Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress,” in *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault Vol. 1, Ethics*, edited by Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997), 256.

⁹ Michel Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life,” in *The Essential Works Of Michel Foucault Vol. 1, Ethics*, edited by Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997), 139-40.

and finalize understandings of the self or of others, replaced with the continual re-opening of narratives and a continual renegotiation of the terms of recognition.

In surpassing the utility of the identity politics surrounding mourning, this estrangement from comfort refuses current practices that define expectations regarding intelligible forms of grieving those lost to war violence (e.g. she was in the military and therefore a hero, so I must mourn her as such and only as such). It is the risk of failing one's friend or loved one. In thinking our experiences of identities in violence in terms of a relational failure, we can retheorize the requirements for moral responsibility in ways that undo, rather than solidify, identity categories within practices of grieving. Perhaps then we can begin to explore potential for ridding ourselves of claims that stratify and separate communities through an identity politics and claims that justify the use of violence and domination in the preservation of those identities.

Gold Star Families and the 'Successful' American

The desire to grieve in recognizable ways allows for opportunities to interrogate the socially constructed nature of the ways we mourn and the way such practices reinforce ideas of the self and an identity politics. An example of such an identity politics being legitimized by public discourse can be seen through the organization Gold Star Mothers. Gold Star Mothers, founded shortly after WWI, is a group operating under a federal charter on the pretenses of a nonpolitical organization. The significance of the gold star is stated to represent the "honor and glory accorded the person for his supreme sacrifice in offering for his country, the last full measure of devotion and pride of the family in this sacrifice, rather than the sense of personal loss which would be represented by the mourning symbols."¹⁰ There are several variations of this

¹⁰ "History." American Gold Star Mothers. <http://www.goldstarmoms.com/WhoWeAre/History/History.htm>. Accessed August 17, 2015.

group that have followed Gold Star Mothers — ‘Gold Star Families,’ ‘Gold Star Survivors,’ among others — but the underlying themes and implications are the same.

The congressional charter incorporating Gold Star Mothers lists the organizational purposes as, among others, to:

perpetuate the memory of those whose lives were sacrificed in our wars; ‘maintain true allegiance to the United States of America;’ ‘inculcate lessons of patriotism and love of country;’ ‘inspire respect for the Stars and Stripes in the youth of America;’ and ‘inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, State, and Nation.’¹¹

These organizational goals can be seen as a mode of shoring up the ways we are to understand ourselves, exemplify a public discourse emphasizing nationalism, patriotism, and the sense of pride that comes with following state interest, specifically as operating above and beyond any sense of personal or familial loss.

Further illuminating the relationship between social identity and military service, Gold Star Mothers has a history of discrimination based on race and citizenship. G. Kurt Piehler writes in *Remembering War the American Way* that initial pilgrimages to Europe after WW I made by gold star mothers to visit the burial sites of their child(ren) were restricted to members only, which at the time meant white women. The African-American pilgrims were segregated from the white pilgrims, white women traveling on luxury liners and African-American women on commercial steamers.¹² More recently, in 2005, the organization refused to grant membership to Ligaya Lagman, a Filipino whose son was killed in Afghanistan because, while a permanent resident and taxpayer, she was not a U.S. citizen.¹³ (On a related note, service in the U.S. military is available to non-citizens as a fast-track option for citizenship, speaking volumes about the role and execution of violence in and for an American identity). Though congressional attention was

¹¹ The Gold Star Mother’s charter is listed under Title 36 of the United States Code, which outlines the role of Patriotic Societies and Observances. List of purposes taken from Gold Star Mother’s website.

¹² See G. Kurt Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2004), 104.

¹³ “Gold Star Mothers Bar Noncitizen,” *The Washington Post*, May 27, 2005. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/05/26/AR2005052601524.html>.

sought to intervene, the organization worked internally to ultimately amend its constitution to admit non-citizen mothers.¹⁴ Practices such as these demonstrate the entangled relationship between military and societal norms and the downstream implications for an identity politics that prioritizes military service in an individual's life narrative and marginalizes other particularities.

Into a public discourse that asserts 'You can serve in our military and exact violence on our behalf, but that doesn't necessarily make you one of us,' enters the Khan family. Khizr and Ghazala Khan immigrated to the United States from the United Arab Emirates when their son, Humayun, was a small child. Raised in Maryland, Humayun went to college at the University of Virginia and, after graduation, joined the U.S. Army where he eventually served as Captain for an infantry company in the 1st Infantry Division. On a deployment to Baquba, Iraq in 2004, he was manning the gates of the military camp when a suspicious vehicle sped towards the gate. Humayun told his fellow soldiers to hit the ground while he signaled to the vehicle to stop. Taking ten steps towards the vehicle in efforts to get it to stop, the suicide bombers and the car packed with explosives detonated, killing Humayun and injuring 10 others.

Following Donald Trump's 2015 call for a ban on Muslim immigrants¹⁵, Humayun's father, Khizr Khan, gave an interview detailing his son's life and how he remembers him. In the interview, Khizr says the recent political turmoil over immigration and incendiary remarks against Muslims does not represent true American values. "I remember when my family arrived here and the first place we went was the Jefferson Memorial," he said. "[Jefferson's ideals] are the values that we have cherished as a family and as Americans."¹⁶ Speaking to his family's passion for American values and ideals, Khizr says of his son that the "values that he learned

¹⁴ See Kevin R. Kosar, "Congressional or Federal Charters: Overview and Enduring Issues," *Congressional Research Service Report for Congress* (April 19, 2013).

¹⁵ Johnson, "Trump calls for 'total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States'."

¹⁶ James King, "The Father of a Muslim War Hero Has This To Say To Donald Trump," *Vocativ* (December 8, 2015). <http://www.vocativ.com/259159/the-father-of-a-muslim-war-hero-has-this-to-say-to-donald-trump/>.

throughout his life came together and made him a brave American soldier. This country is not strong because of its economic power, or military power. This country is strong because of its values...”¹⁷ Reflecting on what could have motivated his son to take the actions he did, those 10 steps towards a suspicious vehicle in a combat zone that ultimately cost him his life, Khizr notes his son’s patriotic constitution: “Maybe that’s the point where all the values, all the service to country, all the things he learned in this country kicked in. It was those values that made him take those 10 steps.”¹⁸

The theme of American values and of giving one’s life through military sacrifice as the ultimate expression of patriotism — as the ‘ultimate gift’ — continued to be a talking point for both political parties, as it generally is, throughout early 2016 leading up to the national conventions. Khizr Khan made a speech at the Democratic National Convention that would spark a highly publicized back-and-forth between the two major parties. On the surface, the arguments from both sides seem to focus on the role of Muslims in America, both American citizens and potential immigrants: Democrats asserting an inclusionary politics where all faiths are welcome in the United States, while Republicans focused on national security and the perceived threat of terrorism. Beneath the surface of both these positions, however, is the shared stance of patriotic militarism and the privileging of national interests found in the identity politics surrounding the American soldier. While trying to differentiate themselves from Republicans, the articulation of a similar identity politics is visible in the strategic appeal for the inclusion of Muslims made by the Democrats through the highlighting of Muslim soldiers and the sacrifices made by Muslim military families. The claim being that, in short, Muslims are successful Americans, too, because they serve in the military and have died fighting American wars.

¹⁷ King, “The Father of a Muslim War Hero Has This To Say To Donald Trump.”

¹⁸ King, “The Father of a Muslim War Hero Has This To Say To Donald Trump.”

At the Democratic National Convention, Hillary Clinton's video introduction for the Khan family was rife with patriotic and military overtones: there were American flags waving in the background, footage of a military funeral procession passing the iconic white grave stones of military cemeteries, and a picture of Humayun Khan in full dress uniform. "If you want to see the best of America," Clinton says, "you need look no further than Army Captain Humayun Khan."¹⁹ When Khizr and Ghazala Khan took the stage, the convention crowd responded with a standing ovation and chants of 'U-S-A.' "Tonight, we are honored to stand here as the parents of Capt. Humayun Khan," Khizr opens, "and as patriotic American Muslims with undivided loyalty to our country."²⁰ In his speech he echoes the American values expressed in the earlier interview, noting his family's path through American Dream. They way that they came to the United States empty-handed but, with hard work and the 'goodness of this country,' they were able to 'share in and contribute to its blessings.'

"Have you ever been to Arlington Cemetery?" Khizr rhetorically asks Donald Trump. "Go look at the graves of the brave patriots who died defending America — you will see all faiths, genders, and ethnicities. You have sacrificed nothing and no one."²¹ The affect that Khan is tapping into here is the pervasive understanding in American political discourse that ties military sacrifice to patriotism and that such sacrifice is a constitutive component of being a 'successful' American. The implication being that a military sacrifice, specifically, is among the greatest demonstrations American values. That a military sacrifice — 'the ultimate sacrifice' of 'giving' the gift of your life in combat — is the pinnacle of what sacrifice and service to one's

¹⁹ Hillary Clinton, "Hillary's America: Captain Khan" (speech, Philadelphia, PA, July 28, 2016), Democratic National Convention Committee, https://www.demconvention.com/app_news/app_news_press_releases/new-video-highlights-hillary-clintons-tribute-fallen-army-captain-humayun-khan/.

²⁰ Khizr Khan, (speech, Philadelphia, PA, July 28, 2016), *Philly Voice*, <http://www.phillyvoice.com/transcript-khizr-m-khans-speech-democratic-national-convention/>.

²¹ Ibid.

country is and means in America. When he says that “If it were up to Donald Trump, he [his son] would have never been in America,”²² Khan is not speaking out against war violence or the fallout from the almost two decade long ‘War on Terror’ but is instead reaffirming the normalized identity politics surrounding service members. He is insisting that his son, a Muslim soldier in the U.S. Army killed in Iraq, be accepted into the fold of dominant practices and be successfully recognized as an American war hero.

The Subversive Affect of Estrangement

Normalized relationships are largely understood as dependent upon a common community, shared values, and similar interests and recurrent notions of identity politics, nationalism, and many other dominant forms of solidarity are derived from this understanding. To think of relationality in terms of the comfort of a shared background and common direction is to dictate the terms of relationships, leaving little to no room for creativity and inventiveness in our relations with others. If we think of queerness as the outcome of an estrangement from dominant relational expectations and as imaginative life modes built around the creation of new practices, we can expand queerness beyond a sexual identity and more as a way of life. In seeking the expansion of queerness beyond the gay community, Michel Foucault asserts that it is not the sex act itself amongst homosexuals that threatens people but the establishment of new affective ties. In a 1981 interview, appearing as “Friendship as a Way of Life” in the magazine *Gai Pied*, Foucault discusses homosexual relationality as playing a role in delinking notions of sexuality from truth.

Pushing against the ‘out of the closet’ identity politics of the gay rights movement in the 1980s, Foucault resists the demand to relate homosexuality with the problems of ‘who I am’ or

²² Khizr Khan, (speech, Philadelphia, PA, July 28, 2016), *Philly Voice*, <http://www.phillyvoice.com/transcript-khizr-m-khans-speech-democratic-national-convention/>.

‘what is the secret of my sexuality’. Instead, he asks us to consider the relationalities that can be ‘established, invented, multiplied, and modulated’ through homosexuality. “The problem,” he tells us, “is not to discover in oneself the truth of one’s sex, but, rather, to use one’s sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships.”²³ In this way, a homosexual friendship becomes a mode of resistance to normalized practices of truth in sexuality and a strategic tool to be implemented at the local level. It is, in part, because of the marginalization by the dominant norms of heterosexuality and the corresponding legal relationships like marriage that Foucault sees gay and lesbian relationships as occupying a unique relational space.

For Foucault, to ‘want guys’ was to ‘want relations with guys’. Seeking more than just the legal recognition of a union, these marginalized relations became a matter of existence: “how is it possible for men to be together? To live together, to share their time, their meals, their room, their leisure, their grief, their knowledge, their confidences?”²⁴ To be ‘naked’ among men, outside of the institutionalized relations of the traditional family structure and the obligatory camaraderie of normalized relationships, is to exist with “a desire, a desire-in-uneasiness.”²⁵ It is the discomfort of this “desire-in-uneasiness” that moves men towards each other and offers the possibilities of moving beyond the boundaries of traditional relationships. This desire-in-uneasiness produces a friendship that is, crucially, separated from the dominant discourse surrounding homosexuality. Foucault’s friendship is neither the “lovers’ fusion of identities” nor the “pure sexual encounter” produced by the “two readymade formulas of homosexuality.”²⁶ These formulas exist as neat representations of homosexuality without the possibility of generating unease to established relational norms because they either respond to a “reassuring

²³ Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life,” 135.

²⁴ Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life,” 136.

²⁵ Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life,” 136.

²⁶ Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life,” 137.

canon of beauty” or “it cancels everything that can be troubling in affection, tenderness, friendship...”²⁷

What does ‘disturb’ people for Foucault is that homosexual individuals are loving each other and it is the affective ties and not the sexual relationships that engender this discomfort. He points to sites of traditional, institutionalized male-male intimacies like the army, the family, the workplace, and notes a contradiction: that the affective intensities traversing these institutions keep these institutions going while, at the same time, shaking them up. The military, for example, is endlessly promoting male-male love in terms of a ‘brotherhood’ and fraternal ties, but at the same time is excessively rigid in its hyper-masculinity where male-male love is shamed. Institutional norms such as these, he says, “can’t validate these relations with multiple intensities, variable colors, imperceptible movements and changing forms. These relations short-circuit it and introduce love where there’s supposed to be only law, rule, or habit.”²⁸ What differentiates Foucault’s friendship from these institutionalized norms is its ability to surpass their utility and to move beyond the dialectical and dichotomous nature of traditional modes of relating.

Foucault offers the becoming of homosexuality as a means of creating relational spaces that escape forms derived from normalized practices. Existing in marginalized spaces that do not have (as rigid) institutionalized practices, same-sex relationships must experiment with novel ways of relating beyond the limitations set by conventional standards. This is not to suggest that homosexual relationships somehow exist outside of discourses of power, but that these fluid and unstable power relations are removed from the dominant and essentializing modes of relating to

²⁷ Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life,” 136.

²⁸ Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life,” 137.

each other. In this way, there are less rigid guides for establishing relationships within homosexual culture and an inventiveness and experimentation is allowed, if not necessary. Institutional norms bring to bear a multitude of protocols, roles, rules, and guidelines for a heterosexual romantic life. In requiring new relational forms, Foucault critiques the notion of homosexuality as another essentialized identity and normalized mode of relating to be replicated and re-presented. Instead offering homosexuality as a site of becoming, as a space of resistance to institutional norms where individuals are confronted with the task of creating their own subjectivities. Again, the task becomes ‘not to discover in oneself the truth of one’s sex, but, rather, to use one’s sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships.’ In conceiving homosexuality not as a fixed identity but as a space for creating new forms of relationships and subjectivities, Foucault separates himself from the conformity of identity politics and conceptions of solidarity based on common interests and common identities. Relationality and friendship becomes a means for individual and collaborative efforts aimed at creativity and experimentation rather than falling back on social norms.

The desire-in-uneasiness sought via friendship — the discomfort — privileges estrangement and alienation, and emphasizes the myriad preferences of those involved, prioritizing what is unknown, unassumed, and uncertain about those we relate with. The solidarity of this friendship is not found, as we have seen, in the marginalized sexual identities and practices of homosexuality, but in certain ways of relating. The importance of the sex act becomes less a focus as the affective ties produced in these relationalities take center stage. In distinguishing between friendship and sexual relations, Foucault differentiates the sexual and the affective dynamics of homosexuality where “homosexuality is not a form of desire, but

something desirable.”²⁹ This distinction between sex acts and emotional ties is important because sex acts are tied to fixed sexual identities whereas emotional bonds are, for Foucault, a means of relating that go beyond such identity politics and the reproduction of social norms.

As Mark Kingston notes in his analysis of Foucault’s subversive friendship, “affection can be subversive but sexual relations cannot.”³⁰ In refusing the link between truth and sexuality that posits fixed identities like homosexual and heterosexual, Kingston asserts, “we might therefore say that Foucault wants to take the ‘sexuality’ out of ‘homosexuality,’ since he regards homosexuality as a social phenomenon that is essentially geared towards the production of novel relationships and only incidentally involves sex between men.”³¹ With an understanding of homosexuality as a practice constituted on experimentation with novel ways of relating, Foucault sees homosexual relationality as challenging essentialized and institutionalized relationships writ large. He is not only trying to undermine those norms that govern practices between same-sex couples but the norms and standards for all relationships. His understanding of homosexual relationality becomes a threat not only to heterosexual norms, but also to the very notion of identity politics and the politics of representation.

Perpetuating a politics of representation poses a threat to processes that seek novel modes of relating because, as Foucault notes, prescriptive modes of solidarity are dangerous in that “as soon as a program is presented, it becomes law, and there’s a prohibition against inventing.”³² What he offers instead is the creation of ‘wide open’ spaces through challenging norms with an ethic of discomfort. “We must show,” he argues, “how things have been historically contingent, for such and such reason intelligible but not necessary. We must make the intelligible appear

²⁹ Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life,” 136.

³⁰ Mark Kingston, “Subversive Friendships: Foucault on Homosexuality and Social Experimentation,” *Foucault Studies* 7 (2009): 10.

³¹ Kingston, “Subversive Friendships,” 11.

³² Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life,” 139.

against a background of emptiness and deny its necessity. We must think that what exists is far from filling all possible spaces.”³³ Importantly, as Kingston notes, while the creation of these spaces begins with homosexual culture, anyone can participate in the challenging of normalized relationships. All relationships can be infused with experimentation and, if inventiveness is employed, “much of the formality that comprises these relationships could, and perhaps should, be deprived of the semblance of necessity it has attained.”³⁴

Instead of asking after the ‘inherent nature’ of homosexual in opposition to heterosexual relationships, our interrogations into the norms that guide and structure our relations should focus on novel ways of relating that just happen to be between such-and-such persons. In “The Social Triumph of the Sexual Will,” Foucault responds to a comment by the interviewer that the ‘gay movement has a future which goes beyond gays themselves’ by reemphasizing his focus on relationality and not sexual identity. Foucault ascribes the broader gay culture, as we have seen, with an inventiveness in terms of types of existences and modes of relating that are neither imitations of nor built out of existing cultural forms, but are instead unique to the relationship. “If that’s possible,” Foucault argues, “then gay culture will be not only a choice of homosexuals for homosexuals — it would create relations that are, at certain points, transferrable to heterosexuals.”³⁵

Instead of maintaining a truth to be found in sexual identity by arguing for an immutable homosexual identity, Foucault asserts we must escape the prescriptive identities, sexualities, and relationalities dictated by social norms and instead operate creatively in the ‘empty spaces’ left by the refusal of dominant practices. Rather than starting from the perspective of an identity,

³³ Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life,” 139-40.

³⁴ Kingston, “Subversive Friendships,” 14.

³⁵ Michel Foucault, “Social Triumph of the Sexual Will,” in *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, Vol. 1, Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 160.

Foucault elaborates a relational vantage point for all individuals, not just homosexuals: “By proposing a new relational *right*, we will see that nonhomosexual people can enrich their lives by changing their own schema of relations.”³⁶ In refusing the institutionalized relationships of contemporary identity-based politics and attempting to reorient established relational norms, as David Halperin notes, “[t]he future that Foucault envisages for us is not exclusively or categorically gay. But it is definitely queer.”³⁷

Queer Failure

It is this queer relationality that I offer as an alternative to the excessively rigid and over-determined relationships currently dominating relationships to war violence. Dominant practices and the social expectations found therein can be disrupted and reoriented through an estrangement of those contemporary practices of grieving the war dead that renders understandings of relational ties and communities as sites of comfort and common interests. How, then, might an estrangement be achieved strategically at the local and national levels? How might we to create spaces where anyone can participate in the challenging of these normalized relationships? I find potential in the realm of failure: in those instances, failing to achieve, to honor, and to maintain is not the pessimism of an overburdened sense of personal responsibility and the perceived shame of being unsuccessful, but rather the opportunity to refuse to participate in the pursuit of success that is demanded of us.

In an interrogation of the boundaries of what constitutes success and failure in contemporary practices, Judith Halberstam’s *The Queer Art of Failure* analyzes the definition of success and dominant conceptions surrounding the role of failure. The aim is not to assess corrective measures to failure in order achieve a socially defined success but, rather, to

³⁶ Foucault, “Social Triumph of the Sexual Will,” 160. Emphasis original.

³⁷ David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1995), 100.

demonstrate the ways in which failing at certain tasks can actually produce preferable alternatives to dominant, normalizing practices. In other words, the goal is not to simply argue for a reevaluation of what currently constitutes success and failure, the goal is to dismantle the logics of success and failure under which we currently live. Of the types of rewards failure can offer, Halberstam states that, “perhaps most obviously, failure allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhoods to orderly and predictable adulthoods.”³⁸

Rethorizing failure as a form of resistance to homogenizing cultural practices, Halberstam sees failure as a means of “refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline” and that failure, as a practice, “recognizes that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent; indeed failure can exploit the unpredictability of ideology and its indeterminate qualities.”³⁹ Turning to an expansive archive to theorize a link between failure and queerness, Halberstam suggests that queers are particularly good at failing, arguing that such failure is productive in terms of countering paradigmatic assumptions of life experiences. If the estrangement produced by failure is subversive to dominant cultural practices and a queer failure can resist normative notions of kinship and relationships on the local and national levels, then the imperative from Halberstam is to ‘fail well, fail often, and fail better.’

This commitment to failing better is set against the scene of the liberal imaginary and a heteronormative backdrop that equates success with advancement, capital accumulation, specific understandings of family, and a delineation of ethical conduct. A queer imaginary, as an alternative, associates failure with nonreproductive lifestyles, nonconformity, and critiques of

³⁸ Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2011), 3.

³⁹ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 88.

‘successful’ life modes that attempt to ‘fail’ in recreating heteronormative standards and the identities, communities, and relationships that allow it to function. The conception of failure here differs importantly from other theorizations of queer failure as a strategic politics, pushing against the antisocial projects of Lee Edelman, Leo Bersani, and others. Such theorization, Halberstam argues, has made failure its centerpiece and has “cast queerness as the dark landscape of confusion, loneliness, alienation, impossibility, and awkwardness.”⁴⁰

While acknowledging the place of queer refusal found in works like Edelman’s *No Future*⁴¹ as folding the symbolic order back onto itself in its critique of political relevance, Halberstam argues that negativity does not need to be apolitical or the relegation of failure to negativity. Halberstam is at odds with Edelman’s project of detaching queerness from the optimistic pursuit of making meaning. Opposing attempts made at binding the queer subject epistemologically to antiproduction and unintelligibility, Halberstam argues for a more explicitly political framing of the antisocial project in ways that “usefully encloses failure.”⁴² Alternatively, Halberstam argues that apolitical negativity is decidedly not queer and ultimately asserts that the negative affect engendered by failure does not foreclose larger relational communities but instead offers alternative modes of politics that form around them.

Edelman calls into question a heterosexual futurity, envisaged through the figure of the Child, and reproduction that constructs a political imaginary in which we build a better future for the sake of our children. With the future oriented around children and reproduction, homosexuality is marginalized by an imaginary that rejects those not justifying current actions and defining futures through the Child.⁴³ As the heterosexual, reproductive futurity would have

⁴⁰ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 97.

⁴¹ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

⁴² See Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 106-109.

⁴³ Edelman, *No Future*, 4.

it, there is ‘no future’ for homosexuality. This understanding of futurity, as Edelman sees it, has come to define not only heterosexual discourse but has become pervasive in queer theory as well. While queer theory as a critique and mode of analysis is typically oriented around conceptions of future potential rendered through a disruption of present practices, Edelman would have us stop reaching for a future altogether. The embrace of queer negativity is, as he states, “[n]ot in the hope of forging thereby some more perfect social order ... but rather to refuse the insistence of hope itself as affirmation, which is always affirmation of an order whose refusal will register as unthinkable, irresponsible, inhumane.”⁴⁴

Working for something other than Edelman’s ‘heterofuturity’ and more alongside notions of queer futurity as a break from heteronormative understandings of time and space, Halberstam’s ‘queer time’ aligns more closely with José Muñoz, who sees queer futurity as a realm of potential that must be called upon but is nonetheless not quite here. Muñoz sees queerness as a horizon for political potential and as, in part, a temporal project that is “the work of not settling for the present, of asking and looking beyond the here and now” where “the purpose of such temporal maneuvers is to wrest ourselves from the present’s stultifying hold, to know our queerness as a belonging in particularity that is not dictated or organized around the spirit of political impasse that characterizes the present.”⁴⁵

Though both Edelman and Halberstam call for an embrace of queer negativity, Edelman promotes an anti-social stance that is seen as freeing queers from the restrictions of a future horizon, while Halberstam maintains optimism in failure not as utopian idealism or a queer pragmatism, but a *productive* subversion of dominant social practices. As Halberstam puts it: “The queer art of failure turns on the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the

⁴⁴ Edelman, *No Future*, 4.

⁴⁵ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 28.

unremarkable. It quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being.”⁴⁶

The liberal imagination offer notions of community modeled after a collection of atomized individuals rather than as a space ordered by complex interactions and relationships. By focusing only an individual’s narrative, in our example here the life of Humayun Khan and the role of the Gold Star Family, we are relying upon a notion of individualized trauma and a liberal narrative that defines failure as the lack of success. To refuse this understanding of community and identities built on and through narratives of individualized trauma that is successfully repaired, redeemed, or justified by reaffirming solidified identities, the focus needs to be less about the story of one individual. The story of Khan needs to be read less in terms of the American war hero who died for his country and for American values, and more in terms of those practices and understandings of community, individualism, and success that his story highlights. What, then, does a queer political imaginary offer us in terms of rereading dominant narratives and retheorizing contemporary understandings of successfully mourning the war dead? In short, what might Khizr Khan failing to honor his son’s death look like and what would it accomplish?

Queering the War Dead

A queering of the war dead refuses to allow mourning to be dismissed as unsuccessful if grieving is anything other than the assignment of war hero, patriot, or the solidification of an American identity for those service members and civilians killed by war violence. Queerness lies underneath normalizing practices, an estrangement sitting beneath the surface of those things that ‘go without saying,’ before being dismantled by logics of success. Rather than protesting the presence of queerness with normalizing processes — a Muslim father seeking the recuperation of

⁴⁶ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 88.

his son's American identity in a nation seeking to deny it — we should use it to disrupt and refuse the idealized constructions of redemptive violence constitutive of conceptions of successful mourning.

The identity politics that encapsulates Humayun Khan's Muslim/war hero status can be read queer in its reorganization of nationalism and identity and in the ways it disrupts the conventional associations surrounding 'successfully' mourned American lives. It is in this moment of public discourse that a queer potentiality can be articulated. In this moment, and so many others that are available in the highly normalized discourse surrounding American veterans and war violence, queerness can be elaborated rather than marginalized. Not as a doubling-down at the level of identity, but queerness as a set of relational estrangements that refigure certain logics: the facilitation, rather than dismissal, of a queer and subversive affect that disrupts and reorients dominant practices.

In order for the continued transmission of cultural practices, dominant norms must maintain the logics and the relationships that allow them to function. Stuart Hall, building on a Gramscian counter-hegemonic practice, sees cultural hegemony as characterized by a multi-dimensional, multi-arena that is not constructed or maintained on one front alone but instead represents a degree of mastery over a whole series of different positions at once.⁴⁷ Taking place in a particular and historically specific 'moment' in the life of a society, the power of such hegemony, for both authors, rests in part with the invisibility of 'organic ideologies;' organic in that they touch practical, everyday, common sense. "Common sense," Hall tells us, referencing Gramsci,

represents itself as the "traditional wisdom or truth of the ages," ... it is the already formed and "taken for granted" terrain ... the ground which new conceptions of the world must take into

⁴⁷ Stuart Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (New York: Routledge, 1996), 424.

account, contest and transform, if they are to shape the conceptions of the world of the masses and in that way become historically effective.⁴⁸

Common sense then, as opposed to ‘philosophy,’ is those cultural representations that lie outside of formal institutions and mechanisms that structure popular thought. Culture becomes hegemonic when it asserts a politics that does not seem political: when it is conveyed through tastes, aesthetics, and preferences that delineate intelligible practices. Common sense is those practices and figures of speech that have entered ordinary life, creating the “folklore of the future, that is as a relatively rigid phase of popular knowledge at a given time and place.”⁴⁹

No culture, however, is completely hegemonic, consisting in part of what Hall, again following Gramsci, called ‘counter-hegemonic’ cultures. For Hall, cultures that run against dominant practices and have counter-hegemonic potential can be located in various subcultures that have different ways of thinking and different ways of relating to themselves and to each other. Importantly, the complex arrangement that constitutes the ideology informing the daily practices of common sense can be altered by these counter-hegemonic subcultures, where dominant conceptions of the world are gradually displaced and transformed. The focus is on the forms of criticism those dominant modes are subjected to and the ways in which the determinate character of the hegemonic terrain are dismantled through processes of differentiation (as I argue, an estrangement). Here, old alignments and relationships are reshaped by making the daily practices of common sense and those things that ‘go without saying’ a critical activity. Common sense, in other words, is affected when the dominant social terrain is confronted with processes of differentiation as counter-hegemonic practices are developed socially. As Hall states, changes

⁴⁸ Hall, “Gramsci’s Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity,” 431.

⁴⁹ Hall quoting Gramsci, “Gramsci’s Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity,” 431.

in ideology and in the downstream daily practices of common sense are conceived “in terms of the articulation and the dis-articulation of ideas.”⁵⁰

A queer relationality disrupts current notions of common sense and those practices that hold together the articulation of those things that go without saying with notions of the ‘folklore of the future’ — for the purposes of this paper, the identity politics we are protecting with violence now in order to project them into the future. Queering the war dead is an estrangement from the organic forms of ‘war hero,’ ‘patriot,’ ‘American,’ and other forms of popular representation. In articulating an identity politics that attempts to recuperate ‘Muslim’ into the fold of a dominant ‘American’ identity, we bury the queerness of that moment and the potential for counter-hegemonic practices that it holds. Instead of marginalizing and denying the queer failure found in a moment where a soldier who is Muslim, killed in combat while serving his country, fails to meet the criteria of a ‘successful’ American, we should embrace it.

As Halberstam reminds us, “queer lives seek to uncouple change from the supposedly organic and immutable forms of family and inheritance; queer lives exploit some potential for a *difference in form* that lies dormant in queer collectivity not as an essential attribute of sexual otherness but as a possibility embedded in the break from heterosexual life narratives.”⁵¹ Queer culture ruptures those dominant practices of grieving the war dead that normalize an identity politics and suppress the articulation of a queerness. In these instances we have to recreate and reimagine a queering that can be asserted through practices of mourning those lost to war violence. The transmission of an estrangement from those practices found within the liberal imaginary and the production of a challenge to normalizing practices can be found in the creation of subcultural public spaces.

⁵⁰ Hall, “Gramsci’s Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity,” 434.

⁵¹ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 70. Emphasis original.

José Muñoz asserts, “Counterpublicity is disseminated through acts that are representational *and* political interventions in the service of subaltern publics.”⁵² Moments where dominant practices collide with those things they are attempting to marginalize, where those things that ‘go without saying’ are brought to the surface, are opportunities for the performance of counterpublicity. When confronted with acts of grieving the war dead in ways that reproduce an identity politics outlining who and what qualifies as a successful American, we should articulate the queerness that the liberal imaginary attempts to negate. We can resist seeking recuperation into the dominant discourses of ‘successful’ mourning processes through the disarticulation of its practices and we can, instead, articulate and proliferate counterpublic spaces. Such performances can be seen not as acting in the name of a queer identity politics with a specific agenda but, rather, as articulating a resistance for a broader audience. In doing so, there is greater potential to disseminate a retheorization of failure not to the already queer, but to a mass culture structured around a negation of the queer. The development of forms of resistance to dominant practices that, as Muñoz asserts, “not only ‘remap’ but also *produce* minoritarian space.”⁵³

Acts of queering the war dead develop counterpublic spaces that I see as having potential to challenge the proliferation of a dominant discursive practice that ties a militarized redemptive violence to normalized identities. The counterpublic spaces engendered through practices of queering the war dead, I argue, refuses the publicity of a dominant sphere which fixes images of military service and American identity. In this challenge of dominant discourse, the counterpublicity produced in queering the war dead exposes moments in dominant discourse where those things that ‘go without saying’ are brought to the surface. Where those marginalized

⁵² Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 147. Emphasis original.

⁵³ Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 148. Emphasis original.

groups who are defined as outside of the dominant public sphere intervene with normalized practices. By embracing a queer failure and the estrangement found in the moment where a decidedly patriotic soldier who is Muslim, killed in combat while serving his country, is still not received as a 'successful' American, we tap into the potential offered by counterpublic spaces.

Acts of queering the war dead develop counterpublic spaces that I see as having potential to challenge the proliferation of a dominant practice that ties a militarized redemptive violence to normalized identities. The counterpublic spaces engendered through practices of queering refuses the publicity of a dominant sphere which fixes images of military service and American identity. In this challenge of dominant discourse, those things that 'go without saying' are brought to the surface and those marginalized groups who are defined as outside of the dominant public sphere intervene with normalized practices.

By embracing a queer failure and the estrangement found in the moment where a decidedly patriotic soldier who is Muslim, killed in combat while serving his country, is still not received as a 'successful' American, we tap into the potential offered by counterpublicity. The potential for ridding ourselves of claims that stratify and separate communities through an identity politics and justify the use of violence and domination in the preservation of those identities.

CONCLUSION

Vivida Vis!

In the United States we have become far too certain about the stability and location of identities formed around the use of injury, both physical and moral. The identity politics of the last several decades has morphed the necessary critique of liberal universalism as a project into its own kind of monster. “Identity politics” has become an indicator in some academic circles for narrowly defined projects that benefit certain groups over others at the expense of the broader applicability of universal application. The realm of identity politics has, in many ways, become a stand in for assertions of the self and, as such, many important critiques have been dismissed as “multiculturalism” and “identity politics” when they are understood as the new placeholders for concretizing programs.

This dismissal, including by those on the Left, runs the risk of missing the methods and strategies used by various communities in their efforts for survival. To more fully understand how cultural production works, we need to understand how it is actualized through perpetuating individuals: how it enters into their formation as acting and deliberating subjects. The study of an identity politics cannot be dismissed as serving notions of essentialized identities, but must be seen in its capacity to determine the threshold for intelligible responses delineated by the public domain. Utilized for its ability to critique the spaces of intelligible opinion within the public domain which shape the scope and viability of the actions that can be taken.

Identity politics has become more problematic outside the academy where sound bites and clickbait headlines have turned any talk of identity into race-, class-, and/or gender-warfare.

The lack of sophistication and depth in the narrowly construed identity-based conversations surrounding issues like the BLM movement, income inequality, and immigration bans, certainly among others, is the failure of more expansive conversations to gain traction. What would it mean to take different understandings, approaches, and critiques and put them into broader political discourse? How would we, for example, elaborate on a conversation at the smoking hut outside the VA hospital that might facilitate an estrangement from normalized identities in violence?

To suggest a queering process and the application of queer relational modes to the ways we experience things like war and moral injury has a tendency to shut down conversations in the hyper-masculine culture that surrounds veterans and the public discourse about the military. If, however, in addition to a shift in discursive practices, we emphasize a gestural shift through queer praxis as a way of life, we can open the possibility for moving beyond the boundaries of traditional relationships and establish imaginative life modes improvised through new affective ties. In other words, a queering of the war dead is less as a political debate to be fought via point – counterpoint, and more an experience actualized through praxis. Queerness not as a political party you reference in those moments of political discussions nor is it an essentialized identity that defines you for others. Instead, queerness is a way of life, something you do, and something you live.

Queer as a way of life is a call for improvisation and inventiveness. A queering of the war dead hints at a future as possibility rather than attempt to define it by offering up the potential found in failure and refusal. It is not a prescriptive plan that pretends to know the inner logics or the universal conditions, but instead articulates a transformation of the processes that lead us into the future. The subversive affect of a queer failure has us look at the present not in attempts to

solidify, to qualify, to redeem, and to limn our experiences so that what we are is what we were is what we always will (must) be, but instead begs for affective ties that lie beyond the logics of redemptive violence and the epistemologies that prop them up.

When confronted with acts of grieving war violence in ways that reproduce the standards for who and what qualifies as a successful American, we should articulate the queerness that the liberal imaginary attempts to negate. In those moments — and so many are available to us in the highly normalized discourse surrounding American veterans and war violence — a queerness can be elaborated rather than marginalized. Queer praxis as relational estrangement refigures the logics of the liberal imaginary, challenging normalized practices through the creation of queer subcultural spaces oriented aimed at undoing processes of categorization.

I use the response to war violence because it is readily available as a location of stability and comfort and houses those identities, like American war hero, that we might want to solidify the most. I see instances of physical and moral injury as the result of war as a good place to look for instances where normalized stability has been enforced. Grieving the war dead, as an institution, has come to be defined through the exclusion of those things that do not meet or might call into question the redemptive nature of American violence: the soldier who can't reconcile his title of hero with the act of killing; the father who doesn't understand why his son, a Muslim soldier killed in combat, does not qualify as a successful American; the communities who volunteer their own to wage war in efforts to uphold the ways they see themselves.

Most antiwar activism, from both liberals and conservatives, calls into question the ends of violence but leaves the violence itself intact. While we debate the merits of installing democracies and chasing the threat of terrorism, the institution of redemptive violence remains untouched. In this way, antiwar activism has become prevalent not only because of a long history

of a nation at war, but because its goals do not undermine the norms and expectations of either side. Put differently, protests concerning the ends of violence can act as an affirmation of the moral positioning of the liberal imaginary and the values, like redemptive violence, it is invested in. Arguments made for a more inclusive definition of American heroism or the value of protecting American borders from terrorism offer no critique of heroic violence or the distinction between terrorism and redemption.

While the opposition, not only to the ends of war but what war represents in terms of a political landscape, is varied, the majority of liberal and conservative contestations both seek to maintain the same means of violence, just towards different applications. When liberals seek a more inclusive definition of American hero and when conservatives attempt to differentiate terrorism from righteousness, they extend the institutions of identities founded in violence but they do not change them. Instead, we are asking how we can expand the old institution of heroic violence to include more people and whether we can extend the old notions of righteous violence to include things like black site detention centers and torture. In both these instances, and the various others like them, criticism is aimed at a reformation of the ways we do war but still model a politics built around stable notions of identity and the righteous violence of the liberal imaginary.

Queering our response to violence offers the potential for approaching old problems in new ways. It emphasizes rather than marginalizes the queerness in process of grieving not in attempts at a more inclusive, toleration of the queer, but by demonstrating the queerness already within normalized practices. It forces us to look at the norms we invest in, critiques our judgments on the norms of others, and puts our assumptions with naturalized processes front and center. Further, if we can refuse the essentializing processes of grieving the war dead in our own

practices, we can also work on disrupting the transmission of narratives that reinforce contemporary logics of violence and the subjectivities that maintain them from generation to generation. Queering the war dead suggests that we take a closer look at the ‘successful’ life narratives attached to processes of grieving not only to make visible the problematic way in which they operate, but to call for their collapse. It is less concerned with a revisionist approach seeking new strategies to achieve old objectives and instead orients itself towards the creation of new affective ties.

Current logics of violence shut down and reject these new affective ties before they are even considered. In the United States, attempts at moral responsibility— to “do the right thing” — for those lives taken, maimed, and shattered by the wars we have sent them to fight are flattened by the institutions of heroic mourning. In making the case for queerness consisting of improvisational creation and less focused on the maintenance of tradition, we orient ourselves towards a reimagining of life narratives in ways that expand, rather than constrict, potential. In our queered history of the present, we can better understand the effects of modern institutions with their solidifications, reductions, and separations and disidentify ourselves from their logics of success, redemption, and moral righteousness.

We are so invested in the institutions of the liberal imaginary that we do not see the ways in which we already engage the queer in our grieving, if only through its suppression. The suppression of the multitude of rhythms and trajectories, logics, and failures surrounding these processes that are pushed aside for the sake of a learned comfort and stability. New subcultural practices of queering emphasize economies of success and redemption as locations for resistance, estrangement, and creation that places the performance of an improvisational politics center stage in the pursuit of new affective ties. Queering is a break with the past and the

traditions that bind us to a history and expectation. It is the reminder that other life modes do exist and that the task to imagine them falls to us.

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