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# Becoming Otherwise: Politics, Metaphysics and Power in Judith Butler and Alfred North Whitehead

Alan Van Wyk

*Claremont Graduate University*

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BECOMING OTHERWISE:  
POLITICS, METAPHYSICS AND POWER  
IN JUDITH BUTLER AND ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF CLAREMONT GRADUATE UNIVERSITY  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
SCHOOL OF RELIGION

BY  
ALAN R. VAN WYK

CLAREMONT GRADUATE UNIVERSITY

2011

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## **APPROVAL OF THE REVIEW COMMITTEE**

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Alan R. Van Wyk as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Dr. Roland Faber, Chair  
Claremont School of Theology  
Kilsby Family/John B. Cobb, Jr. Professor of Process Studies

Dr. Philip Clayton  
Claremont School of Theology  
Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty;  
Ingraham Professor of Theology

Dr. John Quiring  
Center for Process Studies  
Program Director

Dr. Ranu Samantrai  
Indiana University  
Associate Professor, English

## **ABSTRACT**

The post-secular event within which we live is occasioned as the limit of the secular project. The secular project meets its limit in attempting to separate a religious private sphere from a public sphere while at the same time repeating as a demand a religious subjectivation of the public sphere: demanding conformity to a simple subjectivity, producing a world of simple subjects through a theologically determined metaphysics of conversion. In this latter demand secularism enforces a simplicity of its subjects and its world. Yet this simplicity cannot be taken up into or as life. To genuinely live and think the post-secular requires, then, not simply a resistance to the secular but a resistance to simplicity, developing ways of becoming otherwise than simply and of producing a world other than that which conforms to a metaphysics of conversion.

This dissertation proposes to meet the requirements of the post-secular event by developing a post-secular political ontology drawn from the work of Judith Butler and Alfred North Whitehead. Read through and out of these two philosophers of becoming is a post-secular political ontology that is embedded within a metaphysics of creativity, a metaphysic that is itself already infected by the political. At the intersection of the work of Butler and Whitehead a metaphysic arises that is a systematic discourse of the political.

From this metaphysic a political ontology is developed. This political ontology begins with a suspicion of grammar as a suspicion of a subject-predicate form of thought that grounds ontologies of substance. With this suspicion, being is allowed to unfold as its becoming, particularly as a becoming material, so that actuality is a becoming materiality. This is also a relational becoming of feeling, becoming as a process of intensive feeling that can never be

finalized for itself, always suffering its own continual downfall. Finally, but without finality, actuality is a becoming of creativity, opened by a divine violence that ruptures history by the possible, leading to a post-secular political ontology of the future.

“These practices of instituting new modes of reality take place in part through the scene of embodiment, where the body is not understood as a static and accomplished fact, but as an aging process, a mode of becoming that, **in becoming otherwise**, exceeds the norm, reworks the norm, and makes us see how realities to which we thought we were confined are not written in stone.”

Judith Butler

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## INTRODUCTION

### 1. On the need for a Post-secular political ontology

More than a century before its recognition, Karl Marx diagnosed the failure of the secular project. When he begins his analysis of *Capital*, a doubled conversion appears, a series of metaphysical operations marked by “theological niceties,”<sup>1</sup> through which the commodity becomes: individual labor is represented as general labor, while use value is transformed and transferred into relative (exchange) value. We should resist, here, any temptation to an economic reductionism of this analysis: in addition to Marx’s own observation that the commodity is produced through theological as well as metaphysical powers, we should not forget that this is also, famously, presented as an analysis of the fetishism of economics, and so is already presented as an analysis tainted by the religious discourse of his day. It is, in other words, an analysis of the effect of the religious in the production of being.

Within this already religious analysis, Marx argues that the value of the commodity is created by a series of conversions, which is also a certain transformation and movement. The commodity is the representation of a transformation and movement, a logic of production that produces equality of kind out of difference. Following through on an analysis that takes as its central commodities linen and coats, Marx argues that “the linen acquires a value-form different from its physical form. The fact that it is value is made manifest by its equality with the coat, just as the sheep’s nature of a Christian is shown in his resemblance to the Lamb of God.”<sup>2</sup> As Marx points out, it is common to see in linens and coats a difference, and just as common for this difference to be erased by way of the representation of exchangeability. It is the accomplishment of the first volume of *Capital* to rupture this movement – from difference to exchangeability –

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage, 1977), 163.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 143.

and to display this movement precisely as a movement whereby difference is converted into exchangeable value.

Analyzed in the first section of *Capital* is the peculiar mechanism of capitalism – the logic of capitalism – whereby value is created. On one reading, this logic is simply the operation whereby human labor is converted into abstract general labor, such that “labor time, the substance and measure of commodities, inscribes time as the matter and measure of equivalences.”<sup>3</sup> But things are not so simple. Through the series of conversions whereby value as the measure of exchangeability is created, the object of exchange is moved away from itself, to become represented under the sign of value. As Marx argues: “The existence of things *qua* commodities, and the value-relation between the products of labour which stamps them as commodities, have absolutely no connexion with their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom. There it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things.”<sup>4</sup> Within and as a social relation, value is always represented outside of the object itself – outside its materiality – in another, which determines its equivalence. This externalization whereby value is attributed to an object is made by moving through the social in a series of abstractions. In a circular movement, this abstraction is productive of both social relations that are productive of value which function themselves through the abstractive production of value, such that the capitalist machine that creates valued commodities out of objects is also the production of social relations, of relations between laborers.

Here, at the base of capitalism, in its baseness, works labor, being worked over into abstract labor, represented as value as timed. Just as an object is converted into a commodity, so

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<sup>3</sup>Éric Alliez, *Capital Times: Tales from the Conquest of Time*, trans. by Georges Van Den Abbeele, *Theory Out of Bounds*, vol. 6 (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), xvi.

<sup>4</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 165.

too labor is converted into wage labor, the measure of abstract labor. Hidden within capitalism, a series of conversions – the production of an abstract labor, of a measuring time, of an equalizing value; each leading to a series of representations. As Eric Alliez argues, within Marx’s analysis, among these representations a certain “metaphysical figure of capitalism” begins to appear.<sup>5</sup> On Alliez’s reading of Marx, this figure is itself a figure of time: a time unhinged from itself, free to be capitalized on, which runs throughout the history of Western metaphysics. Today, at the end of this history, “[t]he most aberrant movement has become the everyday itself, the daily mastery of money. Here is found the old curse: money is time.”<sup>6</sup> For Alliez, capitalism arises within a time of avarice, where time, and all that occurs in time, can be conquered. And so a conquest of time, which is also a time of conquest: the conquest of Western metaphysics through and by the representation of time.

To speak of a metaphysical figure of capitalism will always already be to speak of and in abstractions. The proper task of philosophic analysis, as Alfred North Whitehead argues, is not to search for *the* truth of our figured abstractions, either in the unraveling of the surface of the figure or by peering behind the abstracted appearance as if there were a deeper reality waiting in hiding to be discovered. Rather, the proper philosophical task is to take our figured abstractions seriously as abstractions.<sup>7</sup> This is to understand our abstractions at work: the work that they do in themselves, as well as the work that is done in fixing them as abstractions. Understanding abstractions – metaphysical figures – in this manner, it becomes necessary to follow both Marx and Whitehead and direct our analysis towards the movements that have produced these

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<sup>5</sup> Alliez, *Capital Times*, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., xvi.

<sup>7</sup> As Whitehead argues in *Science and the Modern World*: “You cannot think without abstractions; accordingly, it is of the utmost importance to be vigilant in critically revising your *modes* of abstraction. It is here that philosophy finds its niche as essential to the healthy progress of society. It is the critic of abstractions.” *Science and the Modern World* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 59.

abstractions. It becomes necessary, in other words, to risk a fuller abstraction, one which can understand not only the production of commodities, but production itself. And here we begin to depart from a strict reading of Marx, realizing that the machine of capitalism is itself built following plans made long before its own arising. The logic of conversion that is the beating heart of the metaphysics of capitalism is not simply that through which the commodity is produced, but is more fundamentally a logic of production that runs through the history of Western metaphysics. Rather than speak of a metaphysical figure of capitalism, it is better to draw on another phrase from Alliez, which he introduces through Augustine, and direct analysis towards a “metaphysics of conversion.”<sup>8</sup> This is to designate as metaphysical, as a metaphysical logic, the machination that is conversion, a machine that can produce a world.

In one sense, of course, Marx already recognizes that the metaphysical logic through which commodities are produced is not simply a logic for the production of objects. Conversion as a metaphysical logic is also a certain subjectivation: a logic in which and through which subjects, in general, are determined. This is the recognition from which Louis Althusser’s intervention into Marxism begins. In recognizing the logic of capitalism as an ideology that operates through the production of subjects, Althusser argues that ideology is a production whereby a “concrete individual,” by “a mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion . . . becomes a subject.”<sup>9</sup> “*Just as* Christians are valued as sheep,” as Marx phrases it. Conversion, in this sense, becomes a metaphysical designation of the logic of interpellation, the

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<sup>8</sup> Alliez, *Capital Times*, 80. This designation needs to be distinguished from the same phrase as used by Etienne Gilson, in his discussion of St. Augustine. Gilson argues that, concerning Augustine, “[h]is doctrine is the metaphysics of his own conversion and remains pre-eminently the metaphysics of conversion” *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, trans. L.E.M. Lynch (New York: Random House, 1960), 240. As used by Gilson, this phrase marks a crude psychologism that does not account for the extent to which the metaphysical nature of conversion for Augustine implicated in a series of authorizations and power relations that eventuate in God’s creation of the world.

<sup>9</sup> Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation),” in *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 174.

mechanism by which subjects are produced precisely as subjects. And so the metaphysics of conversion comes to operate as and through the production of subjects, so that to be is to be converted.

At this point, it would seem that we are still at a distance from the secular. On the one hand, rather than diagnosing the demise of the secular project, in arguing that capitalism arises out of a theological logic, filled with theological niceties, Marx seems to be laying the groundwork for secularism. He is, in other words, inaugurating a critical secularizing of capitalism, completing, as he himself will argue, the unfulfilled liberation begun by Ludwig Feuerbach. On the other hand, the analysis has only moved from commodities to subjects, even if these subjects are ideologically produced. Secularism, it often seems, is a sociological determination of institutional separation: the separation of the private and the public as the justification for, although possibly also the accomplishment of, the separation of the religious from the secular spheres of public life.<sup>10</sup> To arrive only at conversion as a productive logic of subjects is to not yet arrive at this institutional secular project.

Here it becomes necessary to turn to the work of Talal Asad who argues that secularism is “an enactment by which a *political medium* (representation of citizenship) redefines and transcends particular and differentiating practices of the self that are articulated through class, gender, and religion.”<sup>11</sup> The secular project is not simply or fundamentally a reorganization of social space, but is also a production of subjects. Now, of course, as Asad continues, this production itself can only occur within a certain social space, one which is itself secularized, yet it remains the case that the power of this construction flows through and as the production of

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<sup>10</sup> Judith Butler, “Is Judaism Zionism?” in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, Judith Butler, et. al., ed. with intro. By Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathon Van Antwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 71.

<sup>11</sup> Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, modernity*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 5.

subjects.<sup>12</sup> Further, as Asad clearly indicates, the productivity that the secular enforces is a production by way of conversion, conversion now understood as the logic of transcending difference in the service of a simple political representation. In its secular instantiation, conversion becomes the demand to a simple political subjectivity determined as citizen, a demand that is enticed by a promise of self-possession through political representation.<sup>13</sup> As a movement to political representation, conversion becomes a means for overcoming difference, the differences of particularity and the differentiating of particularities. But again, as Asad argues, this demand to be converted does not itself arise *ex nihilo*; it is, rather a demand that is achieved within a conversion of time and space: the production of a time and space of conversion.<sup>14</sup> The secular project is then a project for the determination of time, space and subjectivity, a determination that is itself an enacting of a logic of conversion. The secular project, then, is ground in and comes to be grounded by, a series of theological niceties, and in the name of overcoming a religious demand is itself enacting its own religious command to be converted.

In order to make this connection – from conversion as the production of the commodity to conversion as the demand of the secular – a certain metaphysical abstraction must be made, one which reverses our earlier abstraction. To connect the secular project with capitalism it is necessary to abstract from both a logic of conversion that they both take up and are taken up into. This metaphysical abstraction presents its own dangers, for in the heights of abstraction it is always possible to perform our own aeronautic acrobatics, enacting a theoretical conversion by

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<sup>12</sup> This is, as Asad himself argues, to follow through on an understanding of the movements of power and productivity first articulated by Michel Foucault. Ibid., 16.

<sup>13</sup> Judith Butler, “The Sensibility of Critique: Response to Asad and Mahmood,” in *Is Critique Secular?: Blasphemy, Injury and Free Speech*, Asad, Talal, Judith Butler, Saba Mahmood, and Wendy Brown (The Townsend Papers in the Humanities, Doreen B. Townsend Center for the Humanities, UC Berkeley, 2009), 120.

<sup>14</sup> Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 5.

projecting a similarity onto that which is itself differentiated. To speak of a singular metaphysical logic that capitalism and secularism both take up risks conflating two very different historical movements that are themselves internally differentiated. It is important to be clear, then, that the metaphysical logic of conversion is always itself a logic of production that is enacted in and through the differences that it seeks to overcome. Again, it is a logic for the production of similarity out of difference, and so a logic for overcoming difference that is itself always differentiated.

Yet the risk of abstraction also carries its own reward. In proposing that the secular project takes up a logic that is also taken up by capitalism, we are able to understand one aspect of why the failure of the secular project is often also bound up with a failure capitalism. Without subscribing to a deterministic dialectical theory of history, it is necessary to recognize that the failure of the secular project, just as the failure of capitalism, is a product of both internal contradiction and external resistance. The secular project, just as capitalism, is failing because it harbors within itself a demand for conversion and from being actively and forcibly resisted for demanding a conversion. This is not to dismiss the reality that the resistances to the secular project and to capitalism are also both often bound up with a resistance to a Western imperialism that goes under the name of the modern. Rather, at issue in the demand of a metaphysics of conversion is the micro-power of the logic of this imperialism: a demand to be converted precisely in order to be, and to be simply.<sup>15</sup> Whether this is the demand by which objects must already be commodities or political subjects must be citizens alone, the logic through which this demand is enacted is a logic of conversion. So the resistances to this demand for conversion are always and in diverse ways attempts to become otherwise.

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<sup>15</sup> Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 81.

With this it becomes possible to see the failure of fundamentalist resistances to both the secular project and capitalism. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue, contemporary fundamentalist resistances to capitalism (and, we can add, the secular project) are marked not primarily by their theological conservatism but by their subjective demand. Fundamentalism is, in this sense, the demand for a simple subjectivity, one that exists as and within the static being of alienation, frozen against its own productive differentiating power, through which the subject itself disappears both as an individual and as a body.<sup>16</sup> The theological and political projects of fundamentalism are only possible on the condition of this subjectivation. As we will see in what follows, the subjectivity of fundamentalism is the subjectivity that is produced by a logic of conversion: a simple subjectivity, static and frozen, disappearing in its own being, so that fundamentalism is not, in the end, a resistance to that which it opposes.

Even with this failure of fundamentalism, the end of the metaphysics of conversion is dawning in what is now designated as a post-secular event.<sup>17</sup> Fundamentalisms have most vocally taken up the mantle of living this event, even though they unknowingly repeat the very demand of the secular. Yet fundamentalism is only one of the many resistances to the secular project and capitalism. It has now become clear that the secular project has reached its limit. What follows, under the heading of a post-secular political ontology, is an attempt to take seriously the possibility presented as the post-secular event. This is, quite simply, the possibility of becoming otherwise, of becoming other than that which is demanded by conversion. But in order to be faithful to this event, it becomes necessary to fully articulate the metaphysics of

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<sup>16</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2009), 32-35.

<sup>17</sup> Anthony Paul Smith and Daniel Whistler, "What is Continental Philosophy of Religion Now?" in *After the Postsecular and the Postmodern: New Essays in Continental Philosophy of Religion*, eds. Anthony Paul Smith and Daniel Whistler (Newcastle on Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 13.



conversion that is coming to an end. And for that, we must turn to the beginning of conversion by returning to Augustine.

## 2. The Metaphysics of Conversion

To begin with Augustine.

Yet Augustine is not an absolute beginning, the first appearance of the absolutely new and unprecedented. To make this claim is to already decide on the extent of a certain Platonic and Neo-Platonic influence, on a certain Roman or African Augustine, and finally a certain (orthodox) Christian Augustine.<sup>18</sup> What is unique about Augustine is what is unique about each moment: namely, that in Augustine an entire history is brought together to create a new moment in the world, a new way of being in the world.

In this objectification of Augustine, it seems necessary, if we are looking for that moment when a certain metaphysics of conversion appears, to turn to the *Confessions*, Augustine's own autobiographical and narrative creation. Augustine's *Confessions* begins with a cry for help: "How shall I call upon my God, my God and Lord?" (I, 1).<sup>19</sup> Although much can, and has, been made of this existential cry from which flows both confession and autobiography, for Augustine, this cry unfolds with a certain cosmological weight as it moves immediately from confession to creation. Through a reading of Genesis 1:1, Augustine's initial questioning cry is multiplied: "Who then are you, my God?", "What, I ask, but God who is Lord?", "Who will enable me to find rest in you?", "Who are you to me?" (I, 4-5). Appearing in these opening sections of the *Confessions*, through a tightly woven rhetorical play of confession, prayer, questioning, and

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<sup>18</sup>See especially Peter Brown's biography *Augustine of Hippo* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969). Although this work has, in some respects, been advanced upon in recent scholarship, it is still the definitive biography of the *complexity* of Augustine's life.

<sup>19</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick, Oxford World Classics (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). All further references will be designated in text by book and chapter.

scriptural quotation, is a logic whereby salvation, as the possibility of conversion, is read through creation.

Within this multiplying rhetoric the *Confessions* presents three conversions, each mimicking the other. As Eugene Vance argues, the “narrative discourse must be seen as belonging to a configuration of multiple discourses [that correspond] to a structure of reality that is not manifested in any instance of a specific discourse.”<sup>20</sup> So there is, first, Augustine recollecting himself out of the depths of his life, a recollection that culminates in his own conversion (Books I – IX); second, a discourse on memory, as a theoretical doubling of his autobiographical recollection (Book X); and third, an exegesis of Genesis 1, which is itself God’s conversion of the creation (Books XI – XIII). Within this division of the *Confessions*, the final section retrospectively explains and, more importantly, authorizes,<sup>21</sup> the first two sections: as God brings creation into order, so Augustine brings his own life into order through recollection and conversion, and recollection is established as the means to becoming and knowing this converted being through memory.<sup>22</sup> In these conversions, Augustine reads himself into the narrative of God’s creation where he is finally able to recognize himself as God’s creation. This point of recognition is, as Jill Robbins argues “the narrative’s point of maximum closure, its

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<sup>20</sup>Eugene Vance, “The Functions and Limits of Autobiography in Augustine’s ‘Confessions,’” *Poetics Today* 5, no.2 (1984): 400.

<sup>21</sup>In a discussion of recent anthropological theory, Asad rightly insists on the distance, and connection, between the two authors of biography: “The sense of author is ambiguous as between the person who produces a narrative and the person who authorizes particular powers, including the right to produce certain kinds of narrative. The two are clearly connected, but there is an obvious sense in which the author of a biography is different from the author of the life that is its object.” *Genealogies of Religion; Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), 4.

<sup>22</sup>As John Freccero has argued, “It is as if the historical Augustine had been refined away by his conversion and had become commentator on the very structure that retrospectively seemed to be the principle of his own life’s organization. In other words, the conversion marks the transformation of autobiography into allegory.” “Autobiography and Narrative” in *Reconstructing Individualism; Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought*, ed. by Thomas C. Heller, Morton Sosna, and David E. Wellbery (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 28.

dogmatic foundation, its circular establishing of origin.”<sup>23</sup> This is also the point where autobiography becomes metaphysics, a metaphysic of absolute adequacy for being and knowing the world.

Before this closure can be achieved, within a narrative already in progress, Book VII begins with a note of remorse, of regret: “The older I became,” Augustine laments, “the more shameful it was that I retained so much vanity as to be unable to think any substance possible other than that which the eyes normally perceive” (VII, 1). At this point in the narrative, Augustine has successfully, and beneficially, he thinks, already given up a certain immersion in the desires of this world, desires for worldly fame and glory; he has also given up, beneficially, he thinks, the search for Truth and Wisdom in the crude materialism of the Manichaeans. Yet Augustine is still unable to think God beyond the material, which is, for him, a desperate situation.

For the newly bishoped narrator of the *Confessions*, to think God as materiality is to think a heresy. Augustine goes to great lengths – repeating the dogma of God’s immateriality excessively – to distance himself from his previous Manichaean self.<sup>24</sup> Yet his argument, in Book VIII, only lightly can be called an *argument*. It is much closer to the forceful assertion of dogma than anything else. Although it is also difficult to call this assertiveness faith, it is clear that both reason and faith, for Augustine, trouble this thought of God as an extended, immutable

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<sup>23</sup>Jill Robbins, “Circumcising Confession: Derrida, Autobiography, Judaism,” *Diacritics* 25, no.4 (Winter 1995): 26.

<sup>24</sup>As Roland J. Teske, S.J. argues, given that Augustine was one of the first Christians in the West to articulate a concept of God as incorporeal, his insistence on the orthodoxy of this position ought to be seen not only as a certain rhetorical distancing from the Manichaean’s, but also the rhetorical insistence on the Orthodoxy of his own Milan inspired Neo-Platonist Christianity. “The Heaven of Heaven and the Unity of St. Augustine’s *Confessions*,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 74, no.1 (2000): 39.

materiality, and so Augustine himself is troubled by his inability to think otherwise than materially.<sup>25</sup>

More importantly, for Augustine, moral difficulties arise when trying to think God as both an infinite body and as incorruptible and unchanging. If it were possible to imagine God as an infinite physicality,<sup>26</sup> this would then imply that all things are in God, just as God would be in all things. To preserve God's absolute goodness, then, two options would seem available: either God is good but finite, and there is another substance equal to God which is Evil, thus affirming the Manichaean heresy, or God is both evil and good, and therefore liable to change and ruptured by an internal difference.

The liability to change and internal difference that this latter option opens is registered, for Augustine, as the possibility of a conflict of will in God. For God to be incorruptible means that "no act of will, no necessity, no unforeseen chance" can corrupt God, for God "is God and what he wills for himself is good, and *he is that same good*" (VII, 6, emphasis added.). Not only is God's incorruptibility registered as a unity of will, this will is further unlimited in its efficacy: "For the will and power of God is God's very nature" (VII, 6). God is God as incorruptible and unchangeable as unity – as One: a One that is unlimited and good will. Not that this will can be predicated of God, nor that this unlimited power can be predicated of God, nor that goodness can be predicated of God. Rather, God is this very will, power and goodness, as One, in essence.<sup>27</sup> Yet this unity is, although necessary, nearly impossible for Augustine to think.

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<sup>25</sup>Augustine opens Book VII with the following admission: "From the time I began to learn something of your wisdom, I did not conceive of you God, in the shape of a human body. I always shunned this, and was glad when I found the same concept in the faith of our spiritual mother, your Catholic Church" (VII, 1). This becomes the basis for Augustine's insistence on the orthodoxy of his belief in the incorporeality of God.

<sup>26</sup>Augustine briefly entertains this possibility at VII, 2, imagining God as "a large being, permeating infinite space on every side, penetrating the entire mass of the world, and outside this extending in all directions for immense distances without end."

<sup>27</sup>As Augustine argues in *The Trinity*, "God however is not great with a greatness which he is not himself, as though God were to participate in it to be great; otherwise this greatness would be greater than God. But there is nothing

Just at this moment, a pedagogical miracle occurs: God brings to Augustine's attention "some books of the Platonists" (VII, 13).<sup>28</sup> As if to prove that God's providence is, if nothing else, ironic, the one who brings these Platonic books to Augustine's attention is "a man puffed up with monstrous pride," embodying that which the Platonic books lack: namely, humility, the humility of Christ made flesh.<sup>29</sup> Yet, even with this deficiency, it is in these books – most likely of Plotinus and Porphyry – that Augustine finds not only a hint of the Gospel ("not of course in these words, but with entirely the same sense and supported by numerous and varied reasons" [VII, 13]), but also a way to think God beyond materiality and multiplicity. Augustine finds in these books of the Platonists the way around his *intellectual* block to *thinking* God as simple non-material being.<sup>30</sup>

The path to this knowledge, as advocated in the Platonic books, begins with a turn inward, and with his "soul's eye" Augustine is able to see "above that same eye of my soul the immutable light higher than my mind." This light transcends his own thought, establishing a valued relation: the light, Augustine argues, is "superior because it made me, and I was inferior because I was made by it" (VII, 16). This turn inward and upward is registered as both a turn to the self, the inner workings of the self as an intellection, as well as a turn from the immanent to the transcendent: from *sensibilia* to *intelligibilia*: from bodies and places, to vision and light.

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greater than God. So he is great with a greatness by which he is himself this same greatness.... The same must be said about goodness and eternity and omnipotence and about absolutely all the predication that can be stated of God, because it is all said with reference to himself, and not metaphorically either or in simile but properly – if anything, that is, can be said properly about him by a human tongue." *The Trinity*, ed. by John E. Rotelle, O.S.A., trans. by Edmund Hill, O.P. (New York: New City Press, 1991), V, 11.

<sup>28</sup>This pedagogical miracle does not, though, lead to a pure adoption. As Etienne Gilson argues, "Augustine understood clearly how the notions of generation and emanation differ from the notion of creation. All that is God is begotten, and nothing that is God is created. Everything that is different from God is created, and nothing that is different from God is begotten. From this we can see how fundamentally Plotinus differs from Augustine." *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, trans. L.E.M. Lynch (New York: Random House, 1960), 107.

<sup>29</sup>Speaking of the Platonists in *The Trinity*, Augustine writes, that "[t]here are some people who think that they can purify themselves for contemplating God and cleaving to him by their own power and strength of character, which means in fact that they are thoroughly defiled by pride" (*The Trinity*, IV, 20).

<sup>30</sup>Alliez, *Capital Times*, 79.

With the illumination of this light, Augustine is able to think God as immaterial, and to do so in such a way as to save God's simple goodness.<sup>31</sup> For on the one hand, Augustine argues, just as the source of light is itself not visible, neither is God visible as the source of light. God's nature is invisible, and in a quick movement, Augustine can now argue that God is also immaterial. As light and the source of light, God is that which makes the *sensibilia* possible, while remaining other than that which is witnessed as and through the *sensibilia*. Further, Augustine is able to now understand God as Being as light and source of light. Since everything that is is because of this light, and yet is not this light, difference from God is understood as a lack, as distance. And since God is good, all that comes from this light is also good, and its goodness is measured by its distance from the Good, from the source of light, which is also its difference from God.

With these Platonic books, and God as his guide, Augustine is able to begin the journey to illumination:

In the course of this inquiry ... I was making, I found the unchangeable and authentic eternity of truth to transcend my mutable mind. And so step by step I ascended from bodies to the soul which perceives through the body, and from there to its inward force, to which bodily senses report external sensations, this being as high as beasts go. From there again I ascended to the power of reasoning to which is to be attributed the power of judging the deliverances of the bodily senses. This power, which in myself I found to be mutable, raised itself to the level of its own intelligence, and led my thinking out of the ruts of habit. It withdrew itself from the contradictory swarms of imaginative fantasies, so as to discover the light by which it was flooded.... So in the flash of a trembling glance it attained to that which is. At that moment I saw your 'invisible nature understood through the things which are made' (VII, 23).

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<sup>31</sup> This ability to think God as immaterial, and so to think God as wholly good, is also the ground of Augustine's determination of the unity of God in *The Trinity*: "God however is not great with a greatness which he is not himself, as though God were to participate in it to be great; otherwise this greatness would be greater than God. But there is nothing greater than God. So he is great with a greatness by which he is himself this same greatness. . . . The same must be said about goodness and eternity and omnipotence and about absolutely all the predications that can be stated of God, because it is all said with reference to himself, and not metaphorically either or in simile but properly – if anything, that is, can be said properly about him by a human tongue."

By passing through a series of judgments on judgment, a series of measurements, Augustine is able to travel this path inward and upward, guided by divine illumination, to catch a glimpse of the source of light – a glimpse of God.

But this is only a glimpse, a passing glance. Although Augustine is able to know God, he is unable to sustain this vision. Augustine finds himself “caught up to you [God] by your beauty and quickly torn away from you by my weight. With a groan I crashed into inferior things.” (VII, 23). The Christianized Platonic path of judgment and measurement provides the intellectual means for understanding God, but it gives no indication of how to sustain that vision. Through it Augustine is unable to sustain his vision of God. Illumination, as an epistemological matter, is literally a letdown. It is with this thud, this let-down, that we hear the limits of Platonism for Augustine, and so find inaugurated the movement from Book VII to Book VIII of the *Confessions*, which is also the move from the gospel of the Platonists to the books of Paul, and grace, which is also, for Augustine, the move from epistemology to ontology. Although the knowledge of God is necessary for seeing God, it is not sufficient. An ontological conversion is also necessary. To be sustained in the Light, it is necessary for Augustine to become weightless. With this, “the final outcome of [Augustine’s] search for wisdom” is found “not in the descriptions of the vision of God in Book VII, but in his account of his decision to accept Christian discipline in Book VIII.”<sup>32</sup>

Book VIII begins, then, with a new desire: “My desire was not to be more certain of you but to be more stable in you” (VIII, 1). More than knowledge, what is needed is a way of being, a certain stability. The desire to sustain the vision of God is now transposed into the desire for one will – for a will of/for God. With this as a background, the narration of Augustine’s conversion – which will be the attainment of a new will – comes quick. Following a

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<sup>32</sup>Stephen Menn, *Descartes and Augustine* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 130.

series of readings, which will become a series of citations of conversion, Augustine finds himself tormented in the garden of his own beginning. In the midst of this torment, a voice: “Pick up and read, pick up and read.” Quickly surmising that this is not the simple chant of a schoolyard game, and so *must* be a divinely originated utterance, if not an utterance from the divine, Augustine retrieves the book of St. Paul he had earlier been reading:

I seized it, opened it and in silence read the first passage on which my eyes lit: ‘Not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticism and indecencies, not in strife and rivalry, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts.’ I neither wished nor needed to read further. At once, with the last words of this sentence, it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled (VIII, 29).

And so, for the moment, it is over. Augustine is changed. With a flood of light, he is made light.

Just as quickly as his conversion comes in the narrative, the narrative itself passes. One more chapter on his last days as a rhetorician, the death of Monica, strangely compressed, and the narrative is over. A flooding of light is all we are told of. For those who wish to find the culmination of the *Confessions* in Augustine’s conversion, Book VIII is quite troubling: as a climax this is amazingly flat, providing no explanation of the means of Augustine’s conversion: everything is left as a question. If we wish to know more about this conversion, we will need to look elsewhere than in Book VIII. In the narrative recollection of this moment, Augustine can only have recourse to a strangely transmitted voice of God and a citational history. The narrative itself cannot tell anymore of this conversion. As James Wetzel argues the moment of conversion cannot itself be narrated because it is the basis of the narrative.<sup>33</sup> To be the ground of its own being it must, it seem, remain hidden as a pure occasion. To discuss conversion itself, there is a need to start again on a new plane of discourse, in a different mode of thought and writing. It

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<sup>33</sup> James Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 214.



becomes necessary to move from autobiography to creation, from self-writing to God's creation as spoken creation, a certain speech that creates the world.

In Book XI of the *Confessions*, an account of creation begins as an extended exegesis of Genesis 1, an exegesis that will structure the remainder of the *Confessions*. In exploring God's creation, Augustine is initially tempted to begin where his own life might begin, with an investigation of his own pre-conversion life read now as mirroring the invisible and unorganized earth of Gen. 1:2. Like his own life prior to its post-conversion recollection, this earth was a chaotic sea, "a deep abyss over which there was no light because it had no form" (XII, 3). A chaotic mess. But without form or light, would this abyss not then more properly be nothing? Yet out of this deep abyss flows the earth, which is, quite clearly, not without form, and is something; it is overflowing with bodies that have form. The mark of these bodies is not their absence of form, but the very fact that they change form, "they cease to be what they were and begin to be what they are not" (XII, 6). From formless to formed, and back to formless. From one form to another form. This is the movement of change, which is also the mark of all that is created. Yet this seems, for Augustine, logically quite impossible. If being is form, a Platonic doctrine Augustine hesitantly accepts, then the formless will also be being-less. But if being-less, then nothing. What is there, then, to take on form? So Augustine proposes a certain "nothing something," [*nihil aliquid*] "a being which is non-being" [*est non est*] (XII, 6). God's creation is not a simple matter of the movement from nothing to something; there is first this intermediary "nothing something." This deep abyss, chaotic sea, "nothing something," is now the site of Augustine's attention, and will become the distinguishing mark of his exegesis. It will also be the site from which the world is born.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 74-75.

Augustine is tempted by the sight of this “nothing something,” tempted to see it as the formless matter out of which God created. The text of Genesis 1, as Augustine reads it, continually wants to equivocate between this “nothing something,” and a creation which “made something and made it out of nothing.” If this “nothing” is to take form, must it then be the “nothing something”? A “nothing something” spoken of as “nothing” for those of us with “slower minds” for us to have “some notion of the meaning where no word is available except that of familiar usage”? But this would then mean that this “nothing something” is co-eternal with God, not created, but that out of which God created. This challenge to God’s preeminence cannot be allowed.<sup>35</sup> For Augustine, only God is eternal, and it is the very mark of eternity that it is only God who is changeless eternity: “‘You alone have immortality,’ for you are changed by no form or movement” Augustine pleads with himself as confession (XII, 11). So even this “next-to-nothing,” the “nothing something,” was itself created out of nothing (XII, 8). God created this chaotic, formless abyss out of nothing, and from this “nothing something” all else will be created.

So to preserve God as ultimate Creator, through the *creatio ex nihilo*, Augustine doubles the creation of the “heaven and earth” spoken of in Gen. 1:1. Prior to the creation of this earth and this heaven, Augustine argues, there was a prior creation of a first heaven and a first earth. The original “nothing something,” the deep abyss, is split into “two entities, one close to [God], the other close to being nothing; the one to which only [God is] superior, the other to which what is inferior is nothingness” (XII, 7). The first entity, heaven, will become the “heaven of heaven,” while the second entity, earth, will become the “heaven and earth” of this world. Out

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<sup>35</sup>As Keller notes, the *creatio ex nihilo*, as the position of the Catholic Church, only emerges as orthodox in the third century, slightly before Augustine’s insistence on it. As she argues, “Among Biblical scholars there has existed ... a near, if nervous, consensus for decades. The Bible knows only of the divine formation of the world out of a chaotic something: not *creatio ex nihilo*, but *ex nihilo nihil fit* (‘from nothing comes nothing’), the common sense of the ancient world.” *Face of the Deep*, 4.

of the chaotic abyss, the “nothing something,” is drawn two worlds, the “heaven of heaven” and the “heaven and earth.” Chaos is converted from formless matter into two entities. The first entity “has become converted to that which cannot change either for the better or for the worse,” while the second entity “remains . . . to be converted to [God] by whom it was made” (XIII, 4 & 5).

Again, Augustine is here drawn into the difficult position of positing that the “heaven of heaven” is itself immutable. For God to possess the “heaven of heaven” – for the “heaven of heaven” to “belong” to God – would require, Augustine seems to believe, that the “heaven of heaven” in some way be like God, at least in regards to change; not equivalent to God, but in some way like God. Possession, apparently, as the only possible mode of being with God, is registered as necessarily the possession of that which is similar. If this were the case, though, then the “heaven of heaven” would be free from change and time, and therefore eternal, co-eternal with God. The Augustinian dogmatism of God’s preeminence will not allow this. For God is the one transcendent Creator. The mutability of the “heaven of heaven” must remain in principle, even if in practice this mutability is checked.

To achieve this similarity, in a moment, in the blink of an eye, “without any lapse to which its createdness makes it liable, by cleaving to [God], [the heaven of heaven] finds power to check its mutability” (XII, 9). The fluidity of the abyss is frozen out of time. By the grace of God, a portion of the deep abyss is snatched from perdition into the static contemplation of God. Literally, by the grace of God, for the “heaven of heaven” would have been “dissimilar to [God] unless by [God’s] Word it had been converted to the same Word by whom it was made, so that, illuminated by Him, it became light and, though not in an equal measure, became conformed to a form equal to [God]” (XIII, 3). Drawn back to its source of creation, a circular movement of

being establishes the “heaven of heaven” in God’s possession. By the work of the Word, by the work of Christ, the “heaven of heaven” is drawn to God, and its “delight is exclusively in [God]. In an unfailing purity it satiates its thirst in [God]. It never at any point betrays its mutability” (XII, 12). Cleaving to God, the “heaven of heaven” remains pure, which is the denial of its own fluidity. By the work of the Word, the “heaven of heaven” is in practice what it is not, and cannot be, in principle.

In the frozen confinement of its own fluidity, the “heaven of heaven” is now also the House of God (XII, 12).<sup>36</sup> And it is this House that will become Augustine’s desired abode, a House free from the teeming multiplicity of the other earth, the earth that has not yet been snatched up into its own being. But life is lived in this other teeming earth, an earth dominated by its yet unfrozen “salty sea-water,” filled with a humanity “deeply inquisitive, like a sea in a stormy swell, restlessly unstable” (XIII, 28). Created beings, Augustine argues, do not yet have their existence in the “heaven of heaven,” but rather live in the non-converted “heaven and earth.” They both live in a world marked by change and are themselves subject to change. This changeability, then, is also the mark of their lack of true being, for true being, as God, is being not subject to change. It is to this being, this changeless and timeless being, Augustine insists, that all creation is called.

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<sup>36</sup> Just as quickly as the “heaven of heaven” becomes the House of God, this House is transformed into the New Jerusalem, Augustine’s “mother” who has above her God, “ruler, illuminator, father, tutor, husband, pure and strong” (*Conf.*, XII, 23). Inscribed in the very moment of creation, in the move from nothing to something, is this gendered mode of being whereby purity, cleaving, and order, on the one hand, and chaos, on the other, are read as opposed pairs of an economy of conversion. As Keller argues, “This passive, incoherent femininity ... is utterly dependent upon the masculine deity for its in/formation.... She abides forever the same, clinging to her husband, mirroring in her unfading beauty his omnipotence” (*Face of the Deep*, 78). So this “nothing something” is after all not entirely formless. It has, at its very inception, a gendered form. This chaotic, fluid deep is the feminine *tehom* that can only find its form, and its purity, in cleaving to her man, her God. This is a strange purity, a purity that is achieved on the one hand by a cleaving that is also a being entered into, but which is also a purity that is a check on her own created nature. Prior to Eve, there is this primordial mother/woman who must deny her own un-fallen nature to find her purity next to God. Out of the chaos of the deep, a good portion, a good woman, is drawn out for an eternal admiration of God. This admiration is achieved in a purity that is itself achieved by a freezing penetration, an “in/formation.” So possession is penetration, and purity is frozen.

If the relation between the material, created world to its creator God is explainable for Augustine as a relation of form giving, so that the created world is marked by its ability to change form, which is also the ability to take on form, the relation between the *temporality* of this created world and God's eternity is much more complex. God did not, in creating out of nothing, merely create this material world. God also, Augustine insists, created time in creating the world. Just as there was no place before creation, there was also no time (XI, 15). Specifically, this second "heaven and earth" was created not only from the "nothing something," but also created with time,<sup>37</sup> and so from then on, form and change, on the one hand, and time, on the other, will always appear together. As Augustine argues, "Out of this [nothing something] were made a second heaven and a visible and ordered earth and beautiful waters and everything else mentioned in the creation narrative after days had come into existence. These things are such that they are subject to ordered changes of movement and form, and so are subject to the successiveness of time" (*Conf.*, XII, 15). Time, then, is the mark of the created world, as the measure of change, as the measure of all that exists as created.

Yet it is not simply a question of time, as if the times are singular. Rather, in Augustine's historical re-creation of a Biblical narrative, two times appear: a time of creation, and a time of the Fall. "With sin, time *becomes* the number of a 'violent' motion, one that is forced and no longer natural, the movement of a will that moves away from God – and everything is as if carried away by the fleeting moment, and things flow like the rush of a torrent."<sup>38</sup> With the Fall, time, which is the measure of change, becomes a time of rot, hurtling towards incoherence. It is within this time that Augustine, and all humanity, until the end of time, lives. "I," he writes, "am scattered in times whose order I do not understand. The storms of incoherent events tear to

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<sup>37</sup> Saint Augustine, *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. by Henry Bettenson, intro. by John O'Meara (New York: Penguin Books, 1984) XI, 6.

<sup>38</sup> Alliez, *Capital Times*, 100.

pieces my thoughts, the inmost entrails of my soul” (XI, 39). This incoherence is the logical outcome of the internalization of the world as conversion is read as creation. For the multiplicity of the world is now registered as a multiplicity in Augustine himself, registered as a multiplicity of wills. When time becomes distension, it retains, as Alliez points out, affinities to both *dissilio* and *multiplico* – dissolution and multiplication.<sup>39</sup> Turning towards that time within which the post-Fall subject now lives, turning away from the eternity that the subject’s nature was created in, the subject now finds itself dissolved across time, in a multiplicity that cannot be brought together.

So begins the revolutionary history of the future to come, which is also, and at the same time, the beginning of historical nihilism, where this world, as made possible by the past, is no longer of real value, and only time moving to non-existence. A non-existence moving behind us, and only a pure presence ahead. As Danne W. Polk argues, this is a “kind of ‘negative’ logic which claims that if temporality is all there is, then there is no hope. It is the other side of the gulf between time and eternity . . . which gives rise to hope.”<sup>40</sup> A soul properly directed, now determined for the future, is the only hope for Augustine, a hope to “leave behind the old days [to be] gathered to follow the One, ‘forgetting the past’ and moving not towards those future things which are transitory but to ‘the things which are before’ me, not stretched out in distraction, but extended in reach, not by being pulled apart but by concentration” (XI, 39). Through this concentration, concentration on the Word and in the Word, intending toward the Word of the future, “we appropriate grace in recollection, and through recollection we are able to effect the gradual convergence of virtue and self-determination.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 109.

<sup>40</sup>Danne W. Polk, “Temporal Impermanence and the Disparity of Time and Eternity,” *Augustinian Studies* 22 (1991): 77.

<sup>41</sup>Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue*, 126.

For Augustine, it is by this appropriation of grace that the human comes to find itself in the Word, and the Word in the self. By this inhabiting, a certain stability is achieved: “Then shall I find stability and solidity in you, in your truth which imparts form to me” (XI, 40). It is the stability of being given a certain form, a form of the Word, that now both produces true words in the soul, by first being in the form of the Word. What Augustine designates as conversion is the moment when he is aware that he is in the Word, and that by being in the Word, he can recollect himself into a narrative composed of true words about himself.

And yet the weight of sin is not so easily overcome. “In this immense jungle full of traps and dangers,” Augustine wishes to boast, “see how many I have cut out and expelled from my heart. . . . Nevertheless when so many things of this kind surround our daily life on every side with a buzz of distraction, when may I be so bold as to say, when can I venture the claim, that nothing of the sort tugs at my attention?” (X, 56). The buzz of multiplicity that is life in time and change continually pulls at Augustine’s affections, pulling his will away from the True Word to all the words of this world. Original sin is the fundamental weight of being in the world. From within this world, “the inescapable weight of the saint to complete this labor [of recollection] marks not the limit of God’s power to redeem, but the incongruity of time-bound and timeless points of view.”<sup>42</sup> Eternity, the eternal Word, can never be fully at home in this world. The time of rot intervenes into every point in life, so that now, post conversion, the two times, the frozen time eternity and the time of avarice, exist together in the heart of the Christian, as intention and distension.<sup>43</sup> Augustine remains torn between a timeless intention for the eternal Word, and a time bound distension within this world of change.

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 215.

<sup>43</sup>Alliez, *Capital Times*, 108.

It is, for Augustine, only in the end of time – in an absolute future that is beyond temporality – that the “heaven of heaven” becomes a possibility again, when fallen humanity will be loved for what it will be. “It is not as we are,” Augustine argues, “that God loves us, but as we are going to be” (*The Trinity*, I, 21). Turning now away from the multiplicity of words in this time, turning away from itself as a time bound being,<sup>44</sup> and turning towards the True Word of the future, the Augustinian soul longs finally for a timeless existence when change will be no more, when signification, as the necessity of time, will end. For Augustine, at the end of time “there is no more need for the regime of symbols administered by the angelic sovereignties and authorities and powers. . . . Until that happens, we see now through a glass in a puzzle, that is in symbols, but then it shall be face-to-face” (*The Trinity*, I, 16). Salvation, for Augustine, moves through a series of displacements: a turn away from the time bound self will open the possibility of a move away from all that is of time, a movement into the eternity of God. Conversion and salvation demand that the self must only strive for what it has not been, what it is not, in favor of what it can be.<sup>45</sup> These two movements – conversion and salvation – enact the demand to close the circle of creation by returning, through the future, to the absolute origin of the Word. To become, as Augustine argues, a part of those “matters which have been produced from the eternal and reduced back to the eternal” (*The Trinity*, IV, 25). Mimicking the “heaven of heaven,” salvation is registered as that moment of return to the Creator, the moment of absolute closure.

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<sup>44</sup>As Augustine argues “when it does act with this intention, and become a good soul, it cannot in fact achieve this unless it turns to something which it is not itself” (*The Trinity*, VIII, 4).

<sup>45</sup>As William E. Connolly observes, “[t]he more one looks into the depths of the human condition – and [Augustine] peer[s] more deeply into this abyss than anyone before and most after – the more it becomes clear how much must be divested from human life and invested in divinity if the very possibility of salvation by a sovereign god is itself to be made secure.” *Identity/Difference; Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox*, exp. ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 126.



Until that end of time, history remains in this time of signification, of multiplying significations. This finally brings us back to the narrative dimension of Augustine's own *Confessions*. Here, then, the *Confessions*, which is also the culmination of conversion, is that mimicking of God's final gathering, now performed here on earth, within the individual. That which God has performed and continues to perform in creation and recollection, Augustine must also continually perform on himself, as the continual work of conversion.<sup>46</sup> Conversion follows the pattern established in the creation of the "heaven of heaven," now internalized into the soul. Although the buzzing multiplicity of time bound existence can never be fully controlled, when the chaotic seas of this time are internalized, there is at least possible a closer approximation to the frozen calm of the "heaven of heaven." Lost in the chaos of the sea, Augustine longs to become a "nothing something" open to the power of God, to be seduced into cleaving to God. In the depth of the Augustine's soul, the chaos of the "nothing something" is interiorized.<sup>47</sup>

This recollection, though, is never enough, nor even where Augustine properly begins. It is clear in the creation of the world that God is the sole creator. The entire movement of Books XI-XIII of the *Confessions* is to establish the creation *ex nihilo*. If there is a parallel established between God's creation and Augustine's recollection, it may be tempting to see Augustine also as his own creator. There is certainly warrant for understanding the development of the Augustinian tradition as entailing such a reading. It may be the case that one mark of the modern is this usurpation by the human author to role of divine author. For Augustine, though, this usurpation never occurs. As Augustine insists, "the mind of man, the natural seat of his reason

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<sup>46</sup>As has been often noted, this work is also a communal work. As John Milbank argues: "True society implies absolute consensus, agreement in desire, and entire harmony amongst its members, and this is exactly (as Augustine reiterates again and again) what the Church provides, and that in which salvation, the restoration of being consists" *Theology and Social Theory; Beyond Secular Reason* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993), 402. On the one hand, this unanimity becomes the justification for the strongest measures of discipline, while on the other, ensuring that sin is the mark of individuality, and so also the mark and the means of existence. See Freccero, "Autobiography and Narrative," 21-22.

<sup>47</sup>Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 68.

and understanding, is itself weakened by long-standing faults which darken it. It is too weak to cleave to that changeless light and enjoy it; it is too weak even to endure that light. It first must be renewed and healed day after day so as to become capable of such felicity” (*The City of God*, XI, 2). The mind cannot on its own achieve that place of rest and purity of cleaving to God that the “heaven of heaven” maintains.

Unlike the “heaven of heaven,” which renounced her mutability in a moment before time, Augustine must struggle in time to become one, still in the presence of God. For just as, from the “nothing something,” a certain portion was instantly frozen in time, while a remainder was still to be collected together out of its own multiplying distension, so too Augustine, at the moment of conversion, is able to come for a moment, face-to-face with God. Yet this first conversion is never complete, and so Augustine remains in the world of time: a world of multiplying signification, awaiting a final moment when time will end. Until then, there is much work to be done, both on himself, and within himself the world. Living no-longer in the time of creation, and not yet in the frozen time of the heaven of heaven, all that remains is to work, here, now.

As has already been argued, this reading of Augustine is not simply a reading of the Augustinian self. It is, rather, a reading of the beginning of a long Augustinian sentence which is only now coming to an end. It is this sentence that I want to designate as constituting and being constituted by the logic of a metaphysics of conversion. Writing his own conversion into creation, Augustine produces a metaphysical machine for the production of a world: a world of time, place, and being. “Since Augustine, all the concepts of metaphysics – activity, will, subjectivity... constitute the *provisions* for that movement of human mastery and seizure of the word that ‘machinates’ (says the citizens of the South) or ‘dissipates’ (answers the Prince of the

North) time *by determining the future from which time comes as in itself Unequal.*”<sup>48</sup> We have not, of course, been given to speak this sentence directly. Rather, we have inherited it as a logic of Western metaphysics, and so one which has passed through a history that cannot be fully recovered here. A logic which has determined the very condition of being as simplicity, a simplicity that must constantly be produced against and out of the ravages of time.

It is in this sense that the Augustinian sentence is taken up into and read by the metaphysics of René Descartes. Descartes, for his own part, is quite aware, if not also ambivalent, about this Augustinian heritage. On the hand, in a number of cases, as in his response to Arnauld,<sup>49</sup> he is willing to accept this attribution of inheritance: “I shall not waste time here by thanking my distinguished critic for bringing in the authority of St. Augustine to support me...” (CSM II, 154).<sup>50</sup> More often, though, Descartes attempts to establish the absolute originality of his own position, most famously in his letter to Colvius:

I do indeed find that [Augustine] does use [the same argument] to prove the certainty of our existence. He goes on to show that there is a certain likeness of the Trinity in us, in that we exist, we know that we exist, and we love the existence and the knowledge we have of it. I, on the other hand, use the argument to show that this I that is thinking is an immaterial substance with no bodily element. These are two very different things.<sup>51</sup>

If, at times, Descartes accepts the authority of Augustine to authorize his own innovation, as in his response to Arnauld, he will also, and with much greater rigor, attempt to reclaim this

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<sup>48</sup>Alliez, *Capital Times*, 113.

<sup>49</sup>In his published objections to Descartes’ *Meditations*, Antoine Arnauld opens with a note of astonishment: “The first thing that I find remarkable is that our distinguished author has laid down as the basis for his entire philosophy exactly the same principle as that laid down by St. Augustine – a man of the sharpest intellect and a remarkable thinker, not only on theological topics but also on philosophical ones” (CSM II, 139).

<sup>50</sup>All passages from Descartes, including *Objections and Replies*, taken from *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. I, Trans. by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), and *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. II, Trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), unless otherwise noted. All passages cited in-text as (CSM I, pp.) or (CSM II, pp.), respectively.

<sup>51</sup>René Descartes, “Letter to Colvius, November 14, 1640.” In *René Descartes; Philosophical Essays and Correspondence*, ed. with intro. Roger Ariew (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc., 2000): 90-91. (Italics in original)

principle, the first principle that is the certainty of the self, for specifically philosophic ends: the ground and beginning of certainty. Whereas Augustine attempted to articulate the discipline and logic of creation which would allow for salvation, a becoming weightless, Descartes attempts to articulate the conditions of certainty, the certainty of being by being. Yet in doing this Descartes will take up and repeat the logic of conversion, replicating in his own *Meditation* the discipline by which Augustine achieved his own simple being. As Antonio Negri notes, Cartesianism is already, then, a methodical metaphysics, a metaphysics of technique, a technique for ordering a world into being.<sup>52</sup> This technique is itself a technique for the mastery of the world:

Through [my philosophy] we could know the power and action of fire, water, air, the stars, the heavens and all the other bodies in our environment, as distinctly as we know the various crafts of our artisans; and we could use this knowledge – as the artisans use theirs – for all the purposes for which it is appropriate, and thus make ourselves, as it were, the lords and masters of nature (*Discourse on Method*, CSM I, 142).

And it is in the development of this technique as a technique of conversion that Descartes is at his most Augustinian.

Descartes begins the creation of this technique as early as the never completed *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*. Here Descartes attempts to determine the world through the certainty of a mathematical order. As Dalia Judovitz argues, Descartes takes mathematics as the science of knowledge for ordering the world because of its ability to generate and verify its own rules.<sup>53</sup> Within this mathematical determination of the world “the object of knowledge must submit to the logic of these rules sketched out in advance. Transferred to the domain of science, this

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<sup>52</sup>Antonio Negri, *The Political Descartes; Reason, Ideology and the Bourgeois Project*, trans. and intro. Matteo Mandarini and Alberto Toscan (New York: Verso, 2007), 63, note 98.

<sup>53</sup>Dalia Judovitz, *Subjectivity and Representation in Descartes: The Origins of Modernity*, Cambridge Studies in French (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 47.

conception of mathematics becomes a model for reason which can gain insight only into that which it produces according to its own plan.”<sup>54</sup>

Mathematics is, for Descartes, both a knowledge of and method for pure and simple objects, a knowledge and method announced in Rule 6: “In order to distinguish the simplest things from those that are complicated and to sort them out in an orderly manner, we should attend to what is most simple in each series of things in which we have directly deduced some truths from others, and should observe how all the rest are more, or less, or equally removed from the simplest” (CSM II, 21). To the extent that this attention is an attention verified by intuition, the method of certainty becomes a method of simple intuition. Yet this is not simply an undirected attention. Rule 6 enacts, as Jean-Luc Marion argues,<sup>55</sup> a decision to not take into view that which is made in the order of being, in the order of that which is given in a multiplicity and specificity, but rather to only take into view that which is made on the order of the mind, the order of mathematized intuition.<sup>56</sup> And the order of this mathematized intuition is an order of “pure, simple, empty, and uniform objectivity.”<sup>57</sup>

Rather than simply marking the domain of certain knowledge, mathematized intuition is a determination of the mode of being of the intuitor and that which is intuited. The world itself, for Descartes, is created as a mathematized world, a world created for intuition. The mathematized experience of intuition, the world of mathematized experience, is a world of absolute simples, experienced by way of a pure experience that “demands the disentangling of

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *On Descartes' Metaphysical Prism: The Constitution of the Limits of Onto-theology in Cartesian Thought*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 74.

<sup>56</sup> Working within a tradition of interpretation begun by Marion, Marjorie Grene argues: “Aristotelian form is the very quintessence of the individual, existent thing. Descartes rejects this alleged foundation of knowledge. It is too subtle, too complicated, too diversifying in the varieties of knowledge it produces, or claims to produce. For it he substitutes the unity of evidence, an indivisible, not in the real world, but present, intellectually, for the mind's inspection” (*Descartes*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co, 1998), 61.

<sup>57</sup> Marion, *On Descartes' Metaphysical Prism*, 77.

the various objects of knowledge *from* the whole of things, and beaming light on the essential separateness of each – its own purity and discrete nature revealed as *it* is.”<sup>58</sup> The simple natures which are known by the decision which founds intuition are known precisely because they are simple. These simple natures will be constituted by Descartes as a world in and as a mathematized order. The certainty that Descartes desires is founded on the intuition of these pure simples, the intuition of the mathematically simple world.

The world, as it is determined in the *Rules*, is a world that is ordered according to mathematized intuition, according to a simple mathematical order of figure and presence. This is a world ordered, in other words, by a human logos of re-presented simple order. Within this fixed and mathematized world, though, there seems to be no place for the subject which produces that world out of its own order.<sup>59</sup> The subject, it seems, to the extent that it appears in the *Rules* at all, appears as an accident of its own production.<sup>60</sup>

The *Meditations* are, at least in part, Descartes’ attempt to write himself, and thereby also the human subject, into the order of the world, the ordered world of intuition, and so to create a necessity of this accidental production. In what can be marked as a clear repetition of Augustine, Descartes turns to the autobiographical to accomplish this task. But here, it is not, strictly speaking, a world that is already given in its order that Descartes must write himself into. For Augustine, the problem of subjectivity is the problem of figuring the relation between creation and the creator as both the world and the human subject are already figured as creations, so that it becomes necessary to figure the subject as a figure of creation. In the mode of a confession, the subject is written into the production of God’s creation by way of conversion, establishing

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<sup>58</sup> Susan Bordo, *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1987), 79 (Emphasis in original.)

<sup>59</sup> Judovitz, *Subjectivity and Representation*.

<sup>60</sup> Negri, *Political Descartes*, 175.

the necessity of the continual production of this converted being. The being of the subject only is by way of being converted. For Descartes, in following the *Rules*, a different problem presents itself. For now, the order of the world, the creation of the world, follows from the order of the human mind: the axiomatic rules of mathematics, determined as and for the order of intuition. It is therefore necessary to figure the subject both as the creator of the world and the creation of that very creation, and so also master of its own creation, master of nature.

The subject, in other words, must be written into its own writing, a world that must be produced as it is being written into. As Foucault argues, the *Meditations* must be read following this double movement: “The *Meditations* require [a] double reading: a set of propositions forming a system, which each reader must follow through if he wishes to feel their truth, and a set of modifications forming an exercise, which each reader must effect, by which each reader must be affected, if he in turn wants to be the subject enunciating this truth on his own behalf.”<sup>61</sup> The *Meditations* become an invitation into the production of a world, a world of truth and certainty, by way of a certain disciplining and creation of a subject, a becoming subject of truth. This invitation is extended by the guarantee of a secure and first principle, the absolutely simple, a first principle that will ground the truth of all knowledge that will flow from this first principle. A first principle that secures the place of the subject within the order of the world, but which also, and at the same time, produces this world of order.

Famously this subject is produced through the procedure of doubt, a purifying of the self of all that is liable to doubt: history, the body, memory. Doubt is the means by which Descartes attempts to purify thought of all that may come to corrode it, both from within and without,<sup>62</sup> and

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<sup>61</sup>Michel Foucault, “My Body, This Paper, This Fire.” In *Michel Foucault; Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*. Ed. James D. Faubion, Trans. Robert Hurley and Others. *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*. Ed. Paul Rabinow. (New York: New Press, 1998). 406.

<sup>62</sup>Bordo, *The Flight to Objectivity*, 81.

so he wills into thought a radical and all encompassing doubt in order to gain a pure origin: “to demolish everything completely and start again right from the foundations” (CSM II, 12).

Yet within the mediation this procedure of doubt reaches a certain limit. After already placing into doubt what has been learned as history and what has been learned through the senses, Descartes encounters a first limit to his ability to doubt: “There are many other beliefs,” Descartes argues, “about which doubt is quite impossible, even though they are derived from the senses - for example, that I am here, sitting by the fire, wearing a winter dressing-gown, holding this piece of paper in my hands, and so on” (CSM II, 12-13). And so on . . . These beliefs, about things so close to the meditating subject, about the material conditions of the meditation, cannot be doubted simply because they come from the senses. It would appear that the material nearness of these beliefs, the almost presence of these objects of belief as constituting the site of the meditation, render impossible the ability to fully doubt them. To doubt these would be, Descartes suggests, madness; it would be to liken oneself to “madmen, whose brains are so damaged by the persistent vapors of melancholia that they firmly maintain they are kings when they are paupers, or say they are dressed in purple when they are naked” (CSM II, 13). This is a material presence that can only be doubted by a physical malady, a physical and medical deformation. The physical presence of the body, the actuality of the meditating subject,<sup>63</sup> the bodied and embodied being of the subject in the world is almost registered as a self-presence, a self-presence that hinders and eradicates the possibility to doubt, a presence that is nearly an absolute self-presence, the absolute presence of intuition and certainty.

To follow into this doubt, Descartes makes clear, would be to fall into madness oneself. Within the movement of the *Meditations*, though, as soon as the possibility of madness is broached, it is disallowed, so that the philosophical discourse can continue. As Foucault argues,

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<sup>63</sup>Foucault, “This Body, This Paper, This Fire,” 408.



the *Meditations* are only allowed to continue as philosophical in being secured by that which remains external to them. In other words, madness can be so quickly dismissed within Descartes' philosophical discourse to the extent that it is already designated as a juridically excluded mode of being: "When Descartes wants no longer to characterize madness but to affirm that I ought not to follow the example of madmen, he uses the term *demens* and *amens*: terms that are in the first place juridical . . . which designate a whole category of people incapable of certain religious, civil, and judicial acts."<sup>64</sup> Descartes' primary example of madness is itself quite telling here: it is not, strictly speaking, that the mad doubt the existence of their bodies, but rather that they misrecognize their place in the political-economic order of society, mistaking themselves for kings when they are simply paupers. The excluded madness is, then, the melancholia of this misrecognition. It is only by properly recognizing oneself within this other order, this political order, that the meditation can continue to follow a philosophical order.

If it is that the possibility of madness is foreclosed as soon as it is proposed, the same effect can be achieved, Descartes continues, by putting into play the memory of sleep and dreams. Although it is necessary to put out of play the doubt of the mad, Descartes insists that it must also be remembered that these same experiences, mad experiences, are a regular occurrence in sleep: it is always possible to conjure the memory of "a man who sleeps at night, and regularly has all the same experiences while asleep as madmen do when awake - indeed sometimes even more improbable ones" (CSM II, 13). The practice of sleep can, then, allow the meditation to continue. Yet the doubt of dreams can itself only take Descartes so far, for this doubt will remain within and as a natural doubt. If doubt is, for Descartes, to provide an absolute beginning, then it must move beyond the natural reasons for doubt already pushed to their limits,

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<sup>64</sup>Foucault, "This Body, This Paper, This Fire," 402.

to metaphysical reasons for doubt.<sup>65</sup> It is in order to reach this metaphysical doubt that Descartes introduces the deceptive and malicious God. Metaphysical doubt, the doubt that will come in its completion, to create an absolute space to begin again from, to begin to reconstruct all knowledge as absolutely certain, will be a beginning free from God, or at least the God of belief, of faith. In order to achieve an absolute beginning, an absolutely free beginning, God has become for Descartes a malicious God, a deceptive God: the God of absolute doubt, and so also the God of absolute absence: the God against absolute presence of certainty.

Within this movement of doubt, the radical completion of doubt is also a certain determination of the meditating subject. Both the sensual subject, as that subject who can know through the senses and be known by the senses, as well as the metaphysical subject, the subject of being, are doubted into the uncertainty of nothingness. The second Meditation begins not only with the doubting subject, but with a subject devoid of all physical being, all history, and, at least rhetorically, all being: “I will suppose then, that everything I see is spurious. I will believe that my memory tells me lies, and that none of the things that it reports ever happened. I have no senses. Body, shape, extension, movement and place are chimeras” (CSM II, 16). It is in the midst of this doubt that Descartes comes upon the experience that will become the first principle of his new thought. “Does it now follow,” Descartes wonders, “that I too do not exist?”

No: if I convinced myself of something, then I certainly existed. But there is a deceiver of supreme power and cunning who is deliberately and constantly deceiving me. In that case I too undoubtedly exist, if he is deceiving me; and let him deceive me as much as he can, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I think that I am something. So after considering everything very thoroughly, I must finally conclude that this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind (CSM II, 17).

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<sup>65</sup> Martial Gueroult, *Descartes' Philosophy Interpreted According to the Order of Reasons*, Vol. 1, tran. Roger Ariew (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 18.

In the very radicalism of doubt, amidst the possible falsity of all that is believed, there remains this that cannot be doubted: doubt itself. Or rather, within this total doubt there appears a doubter, a subject of doubt: one drawn from doubt to become a doubter. A subject posited as the condition of doubt.<sup>66</sup> Here are registered the full implications of doubt not simply as an epistemic possibility, but as an ontological possibility; doubt now becomes the means of the absolute first presence to oneself by way of doubt, a self-presence that cannot be eradicated. In doubt, a circular presence that cannot be eradicated is enacted. It is doubt, and the subject that doubts, and so doubt personified, that comes to be absolutely present to itself in its doubt, and by way of doubt. This is then a presence of absence that assumes itself, that assumes its own self, as that which is present to itself. In the absolute empty space of doubt, where all is doubt, the doubt that remains comes to be asserted as attached to one who doubts; the will to doubt is turned back on itself. Rather than being overcome, doubt comes to determine itself and the subject of doubt so as to provide the absolute moment of certainty, the absolute presence of certainty.

If this absolute doubt presents an absolute certainty, it does so only in the present, in the presence of its immediate present. So it is precisely because of the absolute presence of the subject of doubt that the *Meditations* must begin again. As we have seen, as established in the *Rules*, the certainty that is provided by the pure presence of intuition is only certain to the extent that it is a part of and fixed in an order of representation. Intuition is the mathematized experience of the figure, the figure of representation, and it is as a figure of representation that it allows for certain knowledge of the world. Yet the assertion “I am, I exist” is an experience that has not yet attained representation, it is an experience that is “outside the order of representation

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 20.

proper.”<sup>67</sup> It is an experience within an absence that can only occur in the absolute presence of an absolute present. The subject of doubt produces an experience of itself that is, as might be said, too pure, too present. It is, in the language of Michel Henry, a pure presence that is a pure appearing: the “auto-revelation” of the self, “the revelation of thought itself and not of anything else, any alterity, any objectivity whatever.”<sup>68</sup> Purified of all exteriority, of all that is historical, of all that is material, of everything by way of doubt, Descartes produces a pure space within which to arrive at a pure presence to the self. Yet for certainty, objectivity as the pure presence of representation is required. Certainty requires that this pure experience become the pure experience of representation; doubt must be transformed into certainty, such that now, not only must the pure self-presence of the I to itself in the empty space of doubt be found, but this absolute self-presence must move to a certainty of the self that is able to be represented; absolute self-presence in doubt must become the re-presence of certainty. So the *Meditations* must begin again, a beginning again to regain the subject of certainty beyond the subject of doubt; which will also be to recover a subject which can exist beyond its own moment of self-assertion. Drawn to the necessity of certainty, the fullness of certainty and the fullness of a certain world that must be rebuilt after the reduction of the first two mediations.

Within this determination of assertable being, Descartes is able to assert that discovery of his own being for which the *Meditations* remains a central philosophical text: “At last I have discovered it – thought; this alone is inseparable from me. I am, I exist – that is certain. But for

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<sup>67</sup>As Judovitz argues, following Marion: “The *Meditations* uses the formula – ‘I am, I exist’ – which, by eliminating all logical connection between the terms and excluding thought itself, is valid only if, and as long as, an actually thinking thought thinks the formulation of existence. . . . [I]t follows that the *ego* no longer achieves its existence by conceiving a proposition that links existence and thought by an objectifiable formulation, but rather by actually thinking its existence as thought – in short, as a thinking thought making a performative formulation” (*Subjectivity and Representation in Descartes*, 112). See also Jean-Luc Marion, “What is the Metaphysics Within the Method?” (*Cartesian Questions; Method and Metaphysics*. Foreword Daniel Garber. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999). 33.

<sup>68</sup>Michel Henry, “The Soul According to Descartes,” in *Essays on the Philosophy and Science of René Descartes*, ed. Stephen Voss (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 45.

how long? For as long as I am thinking. . . . I am, then, in the strict sense only a thing that thinks; that is, I am a mind, or intelligence, or intellect, or reason” (CSM II, 18). After the elimination of his being, Descartes asserts again the certainty of his own existence, now rendering that existence as the existence of a mind, a thinker. In the second reduction of the subject, existence is posited not merely by way of doubt nor in doubt, but in the positivity of thought, of that which thinks, so as a subject already caught up in the movement of representation, already a subject of figure, of the figurable. The absolute presence of doubt to itself has been rendered as the absolute presence of the self to itself in thought, in the activity of thinking; the absolute subject of doubt has, in other words, become the subject of certainty, as that is required in the *Rules*. The second reduction of the subject – from the “I am, I exist,” to the “I am a mind” – is the full writing of the subject into the representational certainty of the *Rules*.

This is also the discovery of substance, of the thinking being as a substance, as thinking substance. In the midst of the proofs for the existence of God later in the Third Meditation, Descartes retroactively announces that among the ideas borrowed from the knowledge of the thinking subject is the idea of substance (CSM II, 30). In thinking itself as a thinking thing, existing in and as thinking, the thinking subject is rendered as a substance, and so one limit of substance as existent thought. Substance is now defined for Descartes following the simplicity of the mind in its own existence as thought. The movement from the intuition of the existence of the I to the objectification of that I in and as thought also produces the determination of substance on the model of the thinking I.<sup>69</sup> As Marion argues, “The distinction of substances is, in fact, conferred in our knowledge; their completeness is understood on the basis of their simplicity; and this simplicity is delimited insofar as it is understood. In short, the ego operative

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<sup>69</sup>Marion, *On Descartes' Metaphysical Prism*, 150-169.

in the thinking *cogitatio* deduces the real distinction of substances from itself.”<sup>70</sup> From this deduction of substance from the thinking I, Descartes attributes this same notion of substance to extended things, so that both thinking and material substance are rendered as simple, as unified. As Alfred North Whitehead observes, “what is mere procedure of mind in the translation of sense-awareness into discursive knowledge has been transmuted into a fundamental character of nature.”<sup>71</sup>

The I thinking itself has become certain of both its existence and now also of its essence. Certain, then, of itself both as thinking and thinking substance. If certainty is achieved here, the costs are extremely high. For Descartes has of necessity doubted away all that he has been and all that he can become in order to simply be, and to be simply in the self-presence of certainty. Certainty has required the overcoming of history, of the body, of memory in the name of a simple being of self-presence. And all of this has been achieved in the name of and following a discipline inherited from Augustine as a logic of conversion, a logic for overcoming the historical materiality of the self.

If Descartes transforms the Augustinian logic of conversion into a metaphysics for certainty, Immanuel Kant takes up this logic of conversion into the transcendental, rejecting the Cartesian gesture by which a self-referential knowledge comes to ground all certainty in order to discipline the self not out of its own becoming but rather into a transcendental determination of the limit of reason. No longer determined to a set of practices, the Kantian task of philosophy is the securing of the limits of reasons that have already enacted a demand for simplicity. The critique itself and its unfolding will remain strictly tied to the logic of a rule bound conformity: “The *a priori* conditions of a possible experience in general are at the same time conditions of

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 165.

<sup>71</sup>Alfred North Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), 16.

the possibility of objects of experience” (A111/138).<sup>72</sup> The unfolding of the critical philosophy will itself be produced by the folding back into itself objects of knowledge through a law that is both already in place and secured in its own propriety prior to the appearance of the objects of its application; knowledge will come to be secured when objects are brought back into the limits of the rule bound knowing subject. The simplicity with which Kant claims to begin will lead, within this rule bound circularity, to a radical re-determination of both objects and subjects, and the entire ontological and metaphysical order of knowledge.

Within this trajectory, this Augustinian sentence which is now deployed for the securing of certainty, Kant rejects the possibility of the reductive meditation of radical doubt within which the Cartesian *ego* finds itself in a pure presence to itself. Arguing, in the “Transcendental Aesthetic,” that time and space are the conditions for any possible sensible experience, with time also being the condition of all inner sense, time becomes the necessary condition of all experience both by and of the *ego*:

If the faculty of coming to consciousness of oneself is to seek out (to apprehend) that which lies in the mind, it must affect the mind, and only in this way can it give rise to an intuition of itself. But the form of this intuition, which exists antecedently in the mind, determines, in the representation of time, the mode in which the manifold is together in the mind, since it then intuits itself not as it would represent itself if immediately self-active, but as it is affected by itself, and therefore as it appears to itself, not as it is (B69/88).

In taking up the Cartesian *cogito*, Kant, with the greatest severity, rends the unity of the Cartesian *ego* as existing knowing, and known about, severing it, as Deleuze notes, with the productivity of time:

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<sup>72</sup> All passages from the *Critique of Pure Reason* taken from *Critique of Pure Reason*, Revised second edition, translated by Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). In-text citations reference A or B edition, followed by page in Kemp Smith.

Indeed, Kant explains that the Ego itself is in time, and thus constantly changing: it is a passive, or rather receptive, Ego, which experiences changes in time. But, on the other hand, the I is an act which constantly carries out a synthesis of time, and of that which happens in time, by dividing up the present, the past and the future at every instant. The I and the Ego are thus separated by the line of time which relates them to each other, but under the condition of a fundamental difference.<sup>73</sup>

Within the Kantian determination of knowledge the subject of knowledge is marked by a temporality that renders its appearance as temporal appearance; a subject of knowledge that can only know itself within time, and is limited to a knowledge of that which appears with/in time, the effect of its being affected.

As Theodor Adorno argues, this limitation is properly determined as a resignation, the resignation of finitude that marks the position of the subject within the world: “The *Critique of Pure Reason* has its source in the circumstance that it was in effect the first work to give expression to the element of bourgeois resignation, to that refusal to make any significant statement on crucial questions, and instead to set up home in the finite world and explore it in every direction.”<sup>74</sup> Without following through on the economic specificity of this claim, it remains necessary to recognize that, within Kant, finitude is no longer registered as a condition which must be overcome for the securing of knowledge, but is rather the condition within which knowledge can be secured. The real order of the world, an order of the world that can be known without the restrictions of finitude, if it is even possible to speak this way within and after Kant, is unknowable in principle. Knowledge is secured within and only within the limits of its own finitude. And yet, it is precisely the Kantian gesture to totalize this limit, so that a completed

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<sup>73</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), viii.

<sup>74</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, Ed. Rolf Tiedmann (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 6.



metaphysic, and so a completed knowledge, is possible on this side of finitude.<sup>75</sup> It is this finitude that is constructed, from the ground up, by a prior set of desired determinations to certain knowledge. With this, the “Transcendental Aesthetic” constructs, from the start, the proper site of knowledge. Finitude becomes the home within which the subject of knowledge, the knowing human subject, must encounter the world: it is the only mode of access to a world that is given, not as it is, but as it appears. Yet this appearance itself, from within this limited home of finitude, can be completely looked over, determined, owned: “We have found, indeed, that although we had contemplated building a tower which should reach the heavens, the supply of materials suffices only for a dwelling-house, just sufficiently commodious for our business on the level of experience, and just sufficiently high to allow of our overlooking it” (A707, B735/573).<sup>76</sup>

Yet in constructing this home, at the same moment that Kant establishes the limit of finitude, a further existence is opened up, one which will open up an existence for the subject that transposes the very limits of its own finitude, so rigorously constructed. The finite subject of knowledge comes to its knowledge through a pure law that determines the knowledge that it provides, a law that is enacted simply in its determination. A pure law that will remain free from any encumbrance that may appear from outside itself. Within this pure law of determination another “I” appears, and a different trajectory for thought is opened up, one which cannot be subsumed as resignation, or limitation, at least limitation to that which appears, that which appears in the form of time. Rather, a transcendence that is registered as the transcendental is

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<sup>75</sup> As Slavoj Žižek argues, within Kant, “The finitude of the Kantian subject does not amount to the standard skeptical assertion of the unreliable and delusive character of human knowledge...; it involves a much more radical stance: the very dimension which, from within the horizon of his finite temporal experience, appears to the subject as the trace of the inaccessible noumenal Beyond, is already marked by the horizon of finitude” *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (New York: Verso, 2000), 26.

<sup>76</sup> As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri embed this insight into political language, “Only an actively shaped world is a secure world.” *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 20.

opened up within the finite.<sup>77</sup> On this new level, the transcendental, the subject is taken up into a freedom, a freedom that “passes beyond all limitation” (A317, B374/312). As Deleuze notes, another “I” that acts, that is active in its engagement with the world. An acting that is a second taking up of the Cartesian “I” now as the finite subject able to deploy itself beyond the limits of its own finitude. This passage beyond the limits of finitude can be registered in two movements: a first movement whereby objects are produced as the correlate of the transcendental subject in the production of knowledge, as a determination that is made possible by a passing beyond that which is strictly given in sensibility as its transcendently heightened ground, and a second movement whereby speculative reason itself passes through to the pure Ideas of reason, Ideas that are never encountered in the impurity of the empirical, but which come from beyond the given to determine appearance as that which appears. In this second movement, speculative reason itself opens a space of pure reason, whereby reason can pass through the limits of its finite and sensible conditioning to a higher law that cannot be known but only freely obeyed.

If this doubled going beyond is paradoxically a movement out of and so beyond the finite limits of the knowing subject from within the limits of finitude, it is so only as a movement that is already determined as a unity, as the production of unity by a necessary law of unity. Unity becomes, in Kant, the necessary productive force of reason, returning from a certain transcendent beyond to enforce its own end. If Kant will attempt to control this force in the production of knowledge by marking the limit at which the transcendental deployment of reason passes over to the transcendental illusion which reason is thereby led into, he also displaces this force into the practical, allowing it a free reign, the freedom to completely determine its own object.

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<sup>77</sup>It is in this sense that Deleuze is right to argue that the three *Critiques* are united in their full determination of the relations between the faculties, so that what is often argued to be a transgressive freedom of practical reason only opens up within the complete determination that grounds both pure reason and practical reason, and not as its excess or supplement.

Kant's philosophy, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, becomes, then, a philosophy that determines the limits of the proper and improper deployment of reason in its various capacities under this final demand to law bound unity. This determination itself is productive not only of knowledge, but in its being determined by Kant, becomes the production of a subject, and a nature: as Kant argues, "we can discover [nature] only in the radical faculty of all our knowledge, namely, in transcendental apperception, in that unity on account of which alone it can be entitled object of all possible experience, that is, nature" (A114/140). A determination of proper subjects, properly ensconced in their unitary propriety, and the world of this making that is made precisely as that which returns to itself through the subject of its own making. A final return to a unity that has determined being all along. In this logic of return that comes, by way of a taking up of Cartesian metaphysics, which was itself a taking up Augustinian conversion, a final radical transgression is entered into, whereby this logic itself passes through an internalized purity, a purity that has come to reside at and as the absent site of the transcendental subject, protected from and protected against anything that might come to challenge this absolute certainty. So that in Kant, the pure logic of creation that began as a passage through the pure transcendence of God has come to pass through the pure transcendental absence of the subject. And in this pure transcendental absence sovereignty is again able to be deployed as the complete determination of certain knowledge as the objective capture of being.

Beginning as a narrative of conversion which is itself secured as a procedure of creation, a logic of conversion becomes a metaphysic of conversion, enacted in the capture of the world. This capture is affected as the capture of being in simplicity, a simplicity that overcomes history and materiality, the marks of difference, and the differentiations of any becoming. Conversion is the demand of simple being, a demand that is only now meeting its limit.

### 3. After conversion: a post-secular political ontology

The metaphysical logic of conversion is a logic for the production of simple subjectivity; the production of a subject frozen in a time of the same, frozen against its own productivity, disappeared as both a subject of its own becoming and as an embodied subject within a material world. If this metaphysical logic of conversion begins in Augustine as a theo-logic of creation and salvation, it has been taken up in the history of the West as the philosophical logic of certainty and being, the economic logic of value and the commodity, and the political logic of representation and the citizen. It has been taken up as the logic of the secular project which has attempted to create this, our world. The post-secular event becomes, then, an event for the undoing of conversion, for an unbinding of the productive logic of our inherited metaphysics from its theo-logic of production.

Necessary for this undoing and unbinding is a post-secular political ontology of becoming that will resist the demand for a simple subjectivity. This resistance will be accomplished as an experimental theo-poetics of creativity in which, following the work of Judith Butler and Alfred North Whitehead, being is its becoming, and this becoming is the becoming actual of the possible. Specifically, and as an outline of the work that follows, the post-secular political ontology will be developed in three steps. First, as the logic of conversion has itself become a metaphysic of conversion, the metaphysical demand of simple subjectivity must itself be undone. This undoing of a metaphysical demand for simplicity has been accomplished by Butler through and as the political undoing of metaphysics. This undoing is begun in her first work, *Subjects of Desire*, in which the Hegelian subject is read precisely as a subject of becoming, always implicated in its own temporality, and is continued in *Gender Trouble* as the political insistence on the performative logic of subjectivity. Performativity is, in this sense, both the articulating of

the logic of subjectivity and, at the same time, its conceptual undoing, opening the productivity of the subject to a becoming other. The undoing of the metaphysics of conversion is, then, with Butler a political undoing, opening the metaphysical to its own historical practice, an opening that determines the metaphysical as a practice of the possible.

In a move that is only now being recognized, though, the undoing of metaphysics is, for Butler, not simply a political task. It is also a theological task. Central to Butler's work, then, is a theological critique, a critique which is directed toward the determination of the subject as the singular and simple site of power. Through this critique, the metaphysics of conversion is not only undone by the political but is unbound as the theological. We are left, then, with a metaphysic that has been torn open by the political, rendered by the historical specificity of its own practice.

It is not enough, though, to simply leave the metaphysical in tatters. This would be to succumb to an irrationality of thought, acceptance of a fundamental incoherence into and as the world. If the metaphysics of conversion is to be undone by a political practice of becoming, that political practice must itself become within a metaphysic. The political must itself recognize its own being opened back up into the metaphysical. Although it is often easy to forget this, this is the accomplishment of Whitehead's speculative project, the end of which is, in a rather strict sense, civilization. To avoid this forgetting it is helpful to approach Whitehead as and through the route of a Foucaultian determination of Kant's critical project. That Whitehead is a post-Kantian thinker has been long recognized, but this recognition has often been in the name of an epistemological or ontological inheritance. For Foucault, the Kantian legacy is the legacy of an enlightenment political project, and this project itself is the central achievement of the critical philosophy. In this light, to recognize Whitehead's Kantian heritage is to recognize in

Whitehead a thought that attempts to articulate the conditions for the possibility of experience as a political project, one that is fully immersed in the historical becoming of its own being. With this, Whitehead's metaphysics of creativity and becoming becomes a systematic discourse of the political.

Finally, at the intersection of the work of Butler and Whitehead a political ontology is developed that arises as an ecological politics of becoming and creativity. Political ontology is here developed as an analytic of the multiplicity of power as productive, as the historical conditions for the becoming of subjectivity. This political ontology begins with a suspicion of grammar as a suspicion of a subject-predicate form of thought that grounds ontologies of substance. With this suspicion, being is allowed to unfold as its becoming, particularly as a becoming material. Actuality is a becoming materiality. This is also a relational becoming of feeling, becoming as a process of intensive feeling that can never be finalized for itself, always suffering a death into the other. Actuality is then a becoming of creativity, opened by a divine violence that ruptures history by the possible, leading to a post-secular political ontology of the future.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE POLITICAL UNDOING OF METAPHYSICS

Given that we are all, by now, aware that metaphysics is no longer possible – that it has been proven to be an illusion, a forgetting, or a simple violent capture of thought and being – the appearance, as the opening of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, of *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* might be quite surprising.<sup>1</sup> Our surprise, of course, arises from the fact that the conversation staged in this collection between three of the most radical contemporary political theorists takes place within the metaphysical. The collection itself aims, as the participants themselves claim in the “Introduction,” to “establish the common trajectory of [their] thought and to stage in a productive way the different intellectual commitments that [they] have” (1). Given the participants – Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek – we cannot be faulted for assuming that the central concerns of the conversation, establishing the common trajectories of thought and uncommon intellectual commitments, would arise as a contestation of the names Freud and Lacan, Marx, Gramsci and Althusser, Foucault and Derrida. Yet it is, and here is the surprise, Hegel who becomes the central figure of both commonality and dispute, and so it is Hegelian metaphysics that becomes the site of contestation.

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<sup>1</sup> Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek. *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, Phronesis, eds. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (New York: Verso, 2000). Further references to *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* will appear in text, indicated by *CHU* where necessary. This is, of course, not the only or even most direct production and practice of metaphysics today. Long after its death, metaphysics continues to haunt thought with its desire and possibility. Of greatest interest for the present concern is that ever growing body of metaphysical work being produced in the wake of Gilles Deleuze and Alfred North Whitehead. For two brief introductions to this body of thought, see Keith Robinson, “Whitehead, Post-Structuralism, and Realism,” in *Secrets of Becoming: Negotiating Whitehead, Deleuze, and Butler*, eds. Roland Faber and Andrea M. Stephenson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 53-69; and Catherine Keller, “Introduction: The Process of Difference, the Difference of Process,” in *Process and Difference: Between Cosmological and Poststructuralist Postmodernisms*, eds. Catherine Keller and Anne Daniell, SUNY Series in Constructive Postmodern Thought, ed. David Ray Griffin (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002), 1-30.

This is to immediately recognize, as Whitehead already has, that thought and practice arise within a “universe exhibiting some general systematic metaphysical character.”<sup>2</sup> For our purposes, it is possible to read this partially against Whitehead’s own meaning in two directions. First, thought and practice always arise against a systematic background of that which is given as our relevant history. This given is both the given of thought and the given of practice, or, more technically, the given of dipolar experience. To recognize that the political thought and practice made possible in and through *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* arises within and out of a Hegelian metaphysic is only, then, to give specificity to an already metaphysical givenness. Second, the thought and practice of the political will itself only arise against a background of actuality which always exceeds the political. This excess is the metaphysical generality of the totality of the becoming actual of experience. The political and the theorization of the political draws on and arises out of this metaphysical excess of actuality.

Although it will take the remainder of this chapter and the next to fully articulate what is meant here by the metaphysical and the political, as an opening, it can be proposed that metaphysics is the experimental and speculative conceptualization of the abstract and general conditions of the becoming of actuality. Arising within and against the background of this abstraction, political theory is the experimental speculation of the conditions of subjectivity. As we will see, when actuality is determined as the becoming of subjective experience, and subjectivity is determined as the movement of power, the distinction between metaphysics and the political becomes difficult to maintain. And so although all three discussants in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* position their thought as distinctly political, and so as distinct from but arising within and out of the metaphysical, my primary concern here is the way in which Butler’s

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<sup>2</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, Corrected Edition, eds. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 11. Further references to *Process and Reality* will appear in text, indicated by *PR* where necessary.



political thought and practice functions within the metaphysical. Quite simply, in what follows I want to argue that Butler's political thought and practice arises within the metaphysical as its undoing.

It becomes necessary, then, to begin with an articulation of the place of the political within the metaphysical as this relation is practiced by Butler, particularly in the early *Subjects of Desire* and the late *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*. After this metaphysical background is established as the background of Butler's thought, it becomes possible to unfold her political thought and practice as an undoing of metaphysics. Central here will be an understanding of the metaphysical arising of Butler's key early political concept: performativity. In other words, performativity can be seen as the political thought and practice of the undoing of metaphysics. As we have seen, the metaphysical as it is has been inherited – a metaphysics that Butler designates as a metaphysics of substance – is inhabited by a theological logic of conversion. The political undoing of metaphysics must also be accompanied by an undoing of this theos of the logic of conversion. The political must then also enact and arise with a theological critique. And so it is as a theological critique that Butler's political thought and practice is figured as an undoing of the metaphysics of conversion that we have seen to run from Augustine through Kant to our present. Butler provides for us, therefore, an articulation of the political undoing of metaphysics, an unbinding that occurs through a theological critique.

### 1. The Remains of Metaphysics

To return to the metaphysical site of the political, in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, the speculation of the political is instigated by a questioning, each participant submitting a series of questions for and to the others. Hegel is central to this originating

questioning.<sup>3</sup> Both Butler and Žižek directly figure their instigations in relation to the metaphysics of Hegel. Butler asks: “Does a serious consideration of Hegel lead us to rethink the Kantian oppositions between form and content, between quasi-transcendental claims and the historical examples that are invoked to illustrate their truths?” (*CHU*, 6-7); and Žižek asks: “*Hegel*: is Hegel simply the metaphysician *par excellence*, so that every attempt to assert the post-metaphysical complex of temporality-contingency-finitude is by definition anti-Hegelian, or is the very post-metaphysical hostility against Hegel a kind of index of its own theoretical limitation, so that one should, rather, focus on bringing to the light of day ‘another Hegel’ which does not fit the doxa of ‘panlogicism’?” (*CHU*, 10). Laclau is less directly referential, but no less situated in the metaphysical, beginning with a questioning of the universal (*CHU*, 7), and concluding with a questioning of the transcendental (*CHU*, 8). Although Butler, in proposing a “serious reading” of Hegel, seems to answer Žižek in advance by proposing “another Hegel,” with these two questions the conversation is staged as a questioning not only of Hegel, but of the history of Hegel: on the one hand, the place of history, the historical, the contingent that occurs in those moments that are anything but transcendental within Hegel’s thought, and, on the other, the place of Hegel within the history of thought, as our executor of Kant, and patriarch of Marx. Butler’s answer in advance will be to argue that, yes, there is another Hegel, another Hegel who demands that we rethink both history and the history of philosophy that runs through and to Hegel. And this other Hegel is not only open to history, but is opened by history. As Butler will argue later in the conversation, there is in Hegel a political operation, one that is “a future, an open one, related to the infinity that preoccupies Hegel’s own non-teleological reflections on time, and which surely has some resonance with the open-ended futurity of hegemony on which

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<sup>3</sup> Elena Loizidou, *Judith Butler: Ethics, Law, Politics*, Nomikoi Critical Legal Thinkers (New York: Routledge, 2007), 7.

both [Laclau and Žižek] also depend” (*CHU*, 174). This other Hegel, this Hegel who does not fit neatly into his own history nor our history of him, does not bring an end to history, but rather opens history to a non-teleological future. And this opening is, as we will see, an opening of metaphysics to and by a politics to come.

This Hegel, or as we should say, Butler’s Hegel,<sup>4</sup> the Hegel which has returned as the metaphysical site of a politics to come, is able to return within the movement of a paradox. This is the paradox that arises between the completeness of the Hegelian system and its openness to the infinite, or rather, the paradox that follows from Hegel’s acceptance of negativity as that which will preclude any domesticating closure of infinite experience. As Butler argues in *Subjects of Desire*, her first sustained reading of Hegel:

For a metaphysics to be simultaneously complete and infinite means that infinity must be included in the system itself, but ‘inclusion’ as a spatial relation is a poor way of describing the relationship of the infinite to the system itself. To be able to think Hegel’s absolute, the infinite and the systematic at once, is to think beyond spatial categories, to think the essence of time as Becoming.<sup>5</sup>

It is the ‘inclusion’ of infinite experience within the metaphysical system that opens that system to the history of its own becoming. Within Hegel, the inclusion of the infinite takes place not simply as a conceptually abstract inclusion, but as the narrative of Spirit becoming itself. This Spirit is, as Butler describes him, an “omnivorous adventurer,” who finally comes “to *be* all that he encounters along his dialectical way” (*SD*, 5). On the one hand, the subject of the Hegelian narrative of coming to be comes to be precisely as (dis)embodying the history of his becoming. On the other hand, this coming to be takes place not as a singular and positive history of

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<sup>4</sup> From its publication, *Subjects of Desire* has been seen by some as an utter misreading of Hegel. See, for example, Robert B. Pippin’s review in *The Philosophical Review* 99, no.1 (January 1990): 129-131. Although there are certainly situations in which it will be important to construct a “real Hegel” to compare “Butler’s Hegel” to, for now, our concern is strictly with presenting Butler’s Hegel, and the questions that Butler is confronted by in this Hegel.

<sup>5</sup> Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 13-14. Further references to *Subjects of Desire* will appear in text, indicated by *SD* where necessary.

becoming, but as the movement of the dialectic. The Hegelian subject becoming itself is, as Butler argues, the historical movement of negativity, where it is only in confronting an Other as its own moment of negativity, in being recognized as other and by an Other and so recognizing itself as a subject, that the subject comes to be itself at all.<sup>6</sup> The Hegelian subject is only able to actualize itself, Butler argues, “to the extent that the subject confronts what is different from itself, and therein discovers a more enhanced version of itself. The negative thus becomes essential to self-actualization, and the human subject must suffer its own loss of identity again and again in order to realize its fullest sense of self” (*SD*, 13). Infinite experience is, then, the continual experience of loss: the loss of identity in which the subject is confronted by what it is not. It is this perpetual loss that introduces into Hegel, and Butler is willing to admit that the introduction of this perpetual loss works against ‘Hegelianism’ itself, an infinite movement of history, denying to Hegel the final metaphysical satisfaction that his system desires, for this is an infinite failure that precludes the possibility of the subject finally and fully coming to know itself (*SD*, 12). Given that, for Hegel, to come to know one-self as subject is also to become one-self as subject, negativity will also then preclude any possibility of completed metaphysical knowledge (*SD*, 13).

This is, on the one hand, for Butler to already introduce, within and arising out of a Hegelian metaphysical discourse, the ontological necessity of recognition as the ground of identity and being,<sup>7</sup> and the centrality of negativity to the movement of the becoming subject.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Vicki Kirby, *Judith Butler: Live Theory* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 10-12.

<sup>7</sup> Although the importance of recognition is noted in *Gender Trouble* (*Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge, 1999), Butler first begins to seriously think her political ontology through recognition in *Bodies That Matter* while thinking through the consequences of figuring the ideological production of subjects as interpellation. (See Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 122ff. All further references to *Bodies That Matter* in text, designated as *BTM* where necessary.) Recognition becomes one of the central concepts of Butler’s political ontology in *The Psychic Life of Power*, and has remained central to her thought since that work. See Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*;

In this early reading of Hegel, recognition is a perplexed and perplexing moment. Recognition “begins,” if it ever begins at all, as recognition of an Other, but a recognition that is for the self, that is in the service of the structuring of the self.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, recognition is that which brings an Other into appearance, but again, this bringing into appearance is in the service of the securing and bringing into being of the self (*SD*, 47). For Butler, this is to designate the Hegelian project as both narcissistic and fated to a perpetual failure, for the Other-that- is-for-the-self can never properly fulfill its role as simple object of recognition-reflection for the self. As Butler reads this moment of failure in Hegel, the “initial self-consciousness did not take seriously enough the extent to which the Other is, indeed, *like* itself, i.e., a principle of *active* negation, and so is scandalized by the independent freedom of the Other” (*SD*, 48). If the recognition of an Other as the negative image of the self begins the moment of self-consciousness, it is precisely in the scandal of failed recognition that the self enters into a life and death struggle with the Other, in order to secure itself through an Other that will never provide that security. Yet, to complicate matters further, this Other that comes to be and to bestow recognition is not, for that, an Other that arrives from or as already an Other. Rather, it is, for Hegel, the subject becoming other to himself through which the Other is first recognized as an Other. This further complication is essential for Butler, for if recognition is ontologically necessary as a recognition of the self and the Other, through a recognition of the self as Other and the Other as self, then recognition is always a movement through negativity to an Other who will only impel the self into its own becoming Other to itself from itself. Recognition, in other words, becomes a continual project.

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*Theories In Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997). All further references to *The Psychic Life of Power* in text, designated as *PLP* where necessary.

<sup>8</sup> In this sense, negativity is one of the most contested Hegelian terms in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel A. Chambers and Terrell Carver, *Judith Butler and Political Theory: Troubling Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 125.

Recognition is not solely nor simply an ontological necessity. It is, first and foremost, a movement of self-consciousness, and so a movement of knowledge.<sup>10</sup> This movement of negative recognition originates, for Hegel, within Spinoza's metaphysics. Butler reconstitutes the narrative of this philosophical inheritance by arguing that while Spinoza's metaphysics begins from the vantage point of a completed metaphysical system Hegel "poses the question of how this system is known, and how the knower comes to know himself as a part of this system" (*SD*, 12). In a strangely Augustinian moment, Hegel, it seems, attempts to write himself, as a knowing subject, into the drama of being, specifically, into the self-differentiating drama of Spinozistic substance. The self-differentiating movement of Substance becomes, for Hegel, the self-negating movement of the Subject, knowing itself, as we have seen, through the negativity of an Other(ing).

If, then, the subject is founded on a movement of recognition through negativity, the subject is also, necessarily, implicated within and by a certain temporality, as is the metaphysical narrative of the becoming subject. The *Phenomenology* is, Butler argues, a *Bildungsroman*, inviting the reader into a journey to become herself (*SD*, 20). Yet this invitation into a metaphysical journey of becoming is an impossible invitation, for it becomes an invitation without end. Following Alexandre Kojève, this is, for Butler, to invite history into metaphysics, and so, as we have seen, to open metaphysics to history. By insisting on the historicity of the Hegelian metaphysical narrative, Kojève "unwittingly introduces the possibility that historical action and metaphysical satisfaction may not imply each other mutually" (*SD*, 59). Without this satisfaction, completion will never arrive, so the movement of negativity must continue. On the

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<sup>10</sup> This is a difficult temporality for as Butler argues in Hegel these two moments – the ontological and epistemological – cannot easily be separated for the subject. "Indeed," she claims, "the Hegelian subject only knows itself to the extent that it (re)discovers its metaphysical place; identity and place are coextensive, for Hegelian autonomy depends upon the doctrine of internal relations" (*SD*, 8).

one hand, of course, this may be the beginning of arguing that history will always overcome metaphysics, marking Hegel as the inauguration of the death of metaphysics. But this would be too quick, for as Butler argues, we are not yet done with Hegel. Certainly Butler is not yet done with Hegel, as she argues in the “Preface” to the 1999 edition of *Subjects of Desire*: “In a sense, all my work remains within the orbit of a certain set of Hegelian questions” (*SD*, xiv).<sup>11</sup> Given Butler’s continued explorations of identity, recognition, negativity, and the temporalized becoming of the subject this claim seems to still hold.

Yet it is not simply Butler who is not yet done with Hegel. In the final chapter of *Subjects of Desire*, Butler argues that, although contemporary French theory (and here she means primarily Lacan, Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault and Kristeva) attempts a certain opposition to Hegel, “Hegel is not so easily dismissed” (*SD*, 175). Certainly, of course, one could read this claim as the final insistence on Hegel’s metaphysical mastery of the narrative of the becoming of Spirit, and the insistence of the final satisfaction of his metaphysics. Yet this attempt to reassimilate the opposition to Hegel back into Hegel, is impossible (*SD*, 231). For Butler has already quite clearly denied any metaphysical satisfaction to the Hegelian subject. “Hegel’s subject,” she now argues, “can no longer be entertained, even in an imaginary domain, apart from the thesis of its very impossibility” (*SD*, 231). Yet this is strangely, for Butler, still not yet to be done with Hegel for the quite simple reason that the insistence of the historical into Hegel does not eventuate in the overcoming of metaphysics but rather in the coming of the political.

In the final section of *Subjects of Desire*, “Final Reflections on the ‘Overcoming’ of Hegel,” Butler describes this movement of ‘overcoming’: “Both the ‘subject’ and its ‘desire’ have come to suffer the process of historicization, and the presumed universality of the Hegelian

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<sup>11</sup> Chambers and Carver. *Judith Butler and Political Theory*, 92.

discourse becomes increasingly suspect. Indeed, it becomes crucial to ask just how this subject is constituted, under what conditions, and by what means” (*SD*, 232). The suffering of the historical is not itself an overcoming of the metaphysical in Hegel, but rather a return to metaphysics as the site of its own historical becoming, and a return of the metaphysical subject to its own history. On the one hand, Butler has already read metaphysics – metaphysics in general as well as Hegelian metaphysics – as concerned with and given over to a certain “placing” of the subject.<sup>12</sup> Metaphysics is, for the Butler of *Subjects of Desire*, a philosophical practice of giving and securing a place to a subject, even if, as we have seen, this “place” is a temporalized and so moving place (*SD*, 5). Yet, at least in its Hegelian form, this metaphysical placing is never simply nor solely concerned with the place of the subject, for that place is always a place within: within a community of Others, both human and non-human (*SD*, 58). It is precisely the reconstitution of this metaphysical scene of becoming as internal to the subject itself that constitutes the subject in its becoming. “The substance that is known, and which the subject *is*,” Butler argues, “is thus an all-encompassing web of interrelations, the dynamism of life itself” (*SD*, 23). The place of the metaphysical subject is always a place within: within a community, within a history, within a world.

On the other hand, the philosophical reconstitution of this narrative of becoming a subject is, for Butler, the systematic development of metaphysics. The metaphysical narrative presented in the *Phenomenology*, though, is not simply a narrative about this journey to become a Subject, but “is that journey itself” (*SD*, 21). The metaphysical narrative stages the communal scenes of the subject’s becoming into itself. Yet if this metaphysical narrative is the metaphysical journey of becoming itself, it will always also be a journey of failure. As Butler famously analogizes this

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<sup>12</sup> Chambers and Carver, *Judith Butler and Political Theory*, 95.



journey, the narrative is of “the comic myopia of Mr. Magoo whose automobile careening through the neighbor’s chicken coop always seems to land on all four wheels” (*SD*, 21). If metaphysics is the sceneology of the becoming subject, the community within which the subject becomes, metaphysics is, for Hegel, always dislocated, enacting the scenes of negativity, of dislocation by which the subject becomes (*SD*, 176). Metaphysics, then, becomes open to its own history of becoming the scene of and for the becoming subject.

As we have seen, it is with her reading of Kojève that Butler finds this opening of Hegel within Hegel himself, within the negativity of recognition. In the final section of *Subjects of Desire*, Butler turns to Foucault to fully enter into the historicization of Hegelian metaphysics. This historicization of the Hegelian metaphysical narrative becomes, through Foucault, a “theory of discursive *power*” (*SD*, 219), a power that is productive, polyvalent, non-teleological, and always contested (*SD*, 223-232). The historicized metaphysical narrative becomes, in other words, the political as the movement of power as the condition of the becoming of the subject of history.<sup>13</sup>

It is within this reading of Foucault as a post-Hegelian that Butler determines a politics to come as a politics of subversion.<sup>14</sup> At this early stage in her reading, Foucault proposes, Butler argues, “a tactic of non-dialectical subversion, a position beyond subjection and rebellion which alters fundamentally the form of the cultural nexus of power and desire” (*SD*, 222). As Samuel Chambers argues, it is possible to question Butler’s reading of Foucault here, as she seems to over-read into Foucault a Hegelian understanding of the unfolding of history, in order to develop

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<sup>13</sup> Lois McNay, “Subject, Psyche, Agency: The Work of Judith Butler,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 16, no.2 (1999): 177.

<sup>14</sup> Chambers and Carver, *Judith Butler and Political Theory*, 140.

her own theory of political subversion as completing Foucault's inadequacy.<sup>15</sup> But again, and as Chambers recognizes, whether or not Butler properly understands Foucault at this point may be beside the point. The importance of this final moment of *Subjects of Desire* is found in Butler's attempt to figure her own political thought within and as a politics of subversion, and Foucault is the catalyst and inspiration for this figuration. Moving beyond Chambers, what is important here, within the current argument, is the fact that this determination of politics as subversive comes within and as the concluding moment of an exploration of Hegelian metaphysics.

There is then, already, a political implication in the metaphysical as there is a metaphysical implication in the political. Politics emerges as and within the historical opening of metaphysics, while metaphysics is the context within which the political unfolds its own possibility. This mutual implication is well articulated in Vicki Kirby's recognition that within Butler's reading of Hegel, "the aim is not so much a trumping of Hegel as it is the work of interrogating the political challenge and consequence of finding other worlds, other temporal exigencies and existential possibilities within what seem to be restrictive and oppressive determinations."<sup>16</sup> Metaphysics is never gone beyond, even if it will also be an impossibility. What is at stake within and as this metaphysical politics, and what is at stake in the recently announced return of Hegel, is a determination of a politics of subversion: of the limits of metaphysical critique and the limits of political practice, now rendered as and within an immanent opening of metaphysics itself.

To insist on the metaphysical arising of politics, and to insist on its continual working within a metaphysics, whether that metaphysics be Hegelian, or, as it will become by the time of *Gender Trouble*, a metaphysics of substance, is not to argue that Butler is, or should be read as, a

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<sup>15</sup> Samuel A. Chambers, "'An Incalculable Effect': Subversions of Heteronormativity," *Political Studies* 55 (2007): 659-660.

<sup>16</sup> Kirby, *Judith Butler*, 3-4.

metaphysician. It is, we might insist, as impossible to be a metaphysician as it is to be a gender. Rather, what is of interest here is that what is often construed as the political overcoming of metaphysics is, in this first work, determined as a subversive historical movement within metaphysics itself. The political, it seems, must itself always remain within the metaphysical context of its arising. Yet, at the same time, for this politics to arise within a metaphysics is to also open metaphysics up to a continual undoing, an undoing that is its own temporal productivity. And it is this very undoing of metaphysics that is now registered not as its overcoming but as its political, historical becoming.

## 2. Subversive Practices

It may, of course, be inappropriate to speak of the metaphysical movement of politics within Butler's thought given that *Gender Trouble*, the work that seems to determine the theory that continues to arrive under the name of "Butler," and that has most clearly marked Butler as a political theorist, is inscribed within and functions as an intervention within a feminist political discourse.<sup>17</sup> Even if it seems to first arise within a Hegelian metaphysics, the full emergence of Butler's politics of subversion occurs within a thought that is already, from the first, political. In the 1990 "Preface" to *Gender Trouble* the political intervention of the book is designated as an attempt to ask the question of political possibility when "a radical critique" of identity is brought to feminist political thought and practice (*GT*, xxix). This radical critique is itself structured in two directions: first, as a critical investigation into the possibilities that arise when a singular feminist identity is no longer determinative of feminist political practice, and second, as a critical opening up to contestation of the constitutive regulations through which that singular identity is

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<sup>17</sup> As Chambers and Carver argue, Butler is, and has been from the first, a political theorist, developing in all her works a rigorous political ontology. This ontology is, as they argue, an ontology of power, or rather, the ontological productions of power. For an earlier determination of Butler as a political theorist, developing what he determines as a "weak" ontology, see Stephen K. White, "As the world turns: Ontology and politics in Judith Butler," *Polity* 32, no. 2 (Winter 1999): 155-178.

itself produced. As this radical critique unfolds, both within *Gender Trouble* and through Butler's work subsequent to *Gender Trouble*, it becomes clear that the latter investigation grounds the possibilities of the former, so that the political possibility of feminism arises within the space of this critique. And it is within this two-fold subversive aim that Butler's political thought seems to emerge.

Here, of course, it is necessary to point to the importance of Foucault, now within *Gender Trouble*, but also within Butler's work in general, in formulating this radical critique.<sup>18</sup> On the one hand, Butler's intervention into feminist politics is determined, in large measure, by her reading of Foucault, or rather, the deployments of Foucault against a feminist political discourse that continually returns to a non-thematized prior subject; either a subject of sex, gender, and/or the body. On the other hand, performativity, the central political concept developed in *Gender Trouble*, is itself most fully articulated within *Gender Trouble* amidst a reading of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. In this elaboration performativity becomes shorthand for designating both the practice of Foucaultian genealogy and the regulatory logic that genealogy uncovers within subject production.

In this sense, performativity emerges as a means for engaging a feminist political ontology, or, as the case may be, a political anti-ontology (*GT*, 43), an engagement that attempts to de-naturalize and de-essentialize any singular feminist identity. This de-naturalization will determine any identity that may seem necessary within a representational politics as contingent and constructed, and so contestable within the political itself. Here it is necessary to insist, as Butler herself has continually done, that performativity, as both an analytic concept and a political practice, does not itself abandon the field either of identity politics or representative

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<sup>18</sup> Chambers and Carver, *Judith Butler and Political Theory*, 140.

politics. If a radical critique of identity demonstrates that identities and gender identities in particular, are constructed, then “the critical task for feminism is not to establish a point of view outside of constructed identities.... The critical task is, rather, to locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions, to affirm the local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them” (*GT*, 187-188). Although this determination of the critical task comes by way of a conclusion, after the theoretical grounds of critique have been established, it should not be missed that the initial bi-directional movement of critique announced in the original “Preface” to *Gender Trouble* is here repeated, with this added claim of double immanence: the radical critique of identity is itself taken up from within the practices of identity, and therefore the possibilities that are opened up through that critique are likewise immanent possibilities. The theoretical distance that is traveled from the “Preface” to the “Conclusion” does not then leave behind the domain of identity politics or representative politics but, precisely in opposition to this movement, more strictly embeds the critical practice being developed within identity and representative politics.<sup>19</sup>

As we have seen, it is within a reading of Foucault as a post-Hegelian in *Subjects of Desire* that subversion is first introduced as the determination of a political practice, a practice of political futurity that will remain imminent to the metaphysics it arises within. For Butler, the immanence of critique follows, by necessity, from an analysis of the modern economy of power,<sup>20</sup> especially as that economy of power functions within a politics of representation. Within modern representative politics, Butler argues, power is no longer deployed from a

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<sup>19</sup> Chambers and Carver. *Judith Butler and Political Theory*, 13.

<sup>20</sup> This situating of Foucault is first presented in *Subjects of Desire*, but will continue to structure Butler’s reading not only of Foucault, but of the critique of power itself. See *Subjects of Desire*, 218; and “Indefinite Detention,” in *Precarious Life : The Power of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004), 50-100. Further references to *Precarious Life* will appear in text, indicated by *PL* where necessary.

position of sovereignty or from a singular site. Rather, power begins to, properly and strictly, circulate through the field of representation itself, both setting the limits to that field and setting the terms of access into that field. It is, as Butler argues in *Gender Trouble*, that “the domains of political and linguistic ‘representation’ set out in advance the criterion by which subjects themselves are formed, with the result that representation is extended only to what can be acknowledged as a subject” (*GT*, 4). The economy of power within the political functions according to a strictly circular logic, where to be represented within the political field, one must already be representable within that field. If there is an outside to this field, it is an outside that will always remain quite strictly other than the political itself, and so unknown to and as the political. Any political subjectivity or critique must, then, to be political, arise within the political field itself, a field already determined by the limits of representation.

In attempting to take up this circular movement of power in *Gender Trouble*, Butler turns to Foucault’s analysis of the regulative and productive dimensions of power.<sup>21</sup> Here Butler argues, as a Foucaultian inheritance, that “subjects regulated by [political structures] are, by virtue of being subjected to them, formed, defined, and reproduced in accordance with the requirements of those structures” (*GT*, 4). This is, for Butler, to argue that power, within the political, is both negative and regulative, on the one hand, and positive and constitutive, on the other. In its negative determination, power functions through limitation, prohibition, regulation, control and protection, the most obvious deployments of power as the law both against and in the name of political subjects. In this negative determination, power appears as that which simply prepares and secures a political field for already constituted individuals, determining as a limit the possible for the political subject. If this is all power were it would be an individual choice to

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<sup>21</sup> Brian T. Trainor, “Foucault and the politics of difference,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 29, no. 5 (September 2003): 573.

enter into this already constituted field and to become a political subject within this field; to become, in other words, subjected to the political. Yet, as Foucault has argued, and for Butler convincingly shown, to become subjected to the political is to also already have been “formed, defined, and reproduced” as a political subject (*GT*, 4). An individual must already have become a political subject – must have already been subjected to the deployment of law – in order to enter into the political field. As we have seen, the productive movement of power as it appears in the movement of law is to produce a subject before the law. The very law which, in its negativity defines the limits and protections of the political field, also and at the same instant, determines the subjects of this negative limiting.<sup>22</sup> This temporal productivity will, at the same time, provoke a crisis of temporality, for any political subject will always already be determined as a political subject, such that the invocation of any “before” - the invocation of any ontological “before” of the individual, a temporal location from which an individual will decide to become a political subject - will come to be seen as a fictive invocation of the law itself (*GT* 5).<sup>23</sup> In this instantaneous and circular political temporality, political ontology becomes tautology: to be a political subject is to be a political subject.<sup>24</sup>

For Butler, this circular movement of power, which is both productive and dissimulating, concealing its own productivity, is given as the total domain of the political. “There is,” Butler

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<sup>22</sup> The temporality of this movement must itself be strictly determined according, as Butler argues, to the logic of iteration. Within this logic, the law does not itself pre-exist the subjects of its production, functioning as the prior subject of determination, installing a new-humanism of the law. Rather, the law is only itself in its and through its productions. This determination of the law will be taken up in the chapters to follow; see also the elaboration of the iterability of the law in *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997). All further references to *Excitable Speech* in text, designated as *ES* where necessary.

<sup>23</sup> The fictive status of the pre-political subject is a theoretical development of arguments already articulated in *Subjects of Desire*, where the Hegelian metaphysical subject is argued to be a “fictive subject” who is, for that, no less real nor effective (20-24). It is also a theoretical argument that remains central to Butler’s reading of Nietzsche, especially in *The Psychic Life of Power* (“Circuits of Bad Conscience,” 63-82), and *Giving an Account of Oneself*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2005. All further references to *Giving An Account of Oneself* in text, designated as *GAO* where necessary.

<sup>24</sup> Veronica Vasterling, “Butler’s Sophisticated Constructivism: A Critical Assessment,” *Hypatia* 14, no.3 (Summer 1999): 31.

asserts in the opening gestures of *Gender Trouble*, “no position outside this field...” (*GT*, 8). This is not, as should be clear, to argue for the already accomplished totalized distribution of the political field. For to understand the political field in this sense, as a field that has, in a distributive movement across a plane of social or cultural existence, conquered or overcome a field of individuality that enjoyed a pre-existent but non-political existence, is to again fail to grasp the productivity of power itself. For the political field itself is established in the very productivity of power. To be a political subject is to already be within the field of the political, just as for there to be a political field is for there to be political subjects. It is precisely in the positing and production of a before or outside to the political that constitutes the definitive political movement of power to obscure its own effects.

For Butler, then, any political critique must recognize that the subject in whose name and through whose agency it is deployed is necessarily already caught up in the very structures of power it wishes to engage.<sup>25</sup> The political subject is already subject to the politics of its critique. The import of this Foucaultian inheritance is that it marks as necessarily immanent any critique which attempts to open political possibilities. Political critique must be genealogical (*GT*, 8). It is, in this sense, that genealogy takes on a philosophical ethos of permanent critique, a critique that recognizes itself as and within the critique of its own possibility.<sup>26</sup> And it is within this necessity of determining political critique as genealogical that the central concept of this subversive and permanent political critique, performativity, is first elaborated, within *Gender Trouble*, as a political concept: it is the concept for determining the genealogical moment of subjectivity. Performativity comes to mark, and in its marking make visible and open to

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<sup>25</sup> Sara Salih, *Judith Butler*, Routledge Critical Thinkers, series ed. Robert Eagleston (New York: Routledge, 2002), 39.

<sup>26</sup> Michel Foucault, “What Is Enlightenment?” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984, Vol. 1*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997), 304-319.



contestation, the production of subjects, and so the production of political subjects. It is in this sense that the first full elaboration, although not appearance, of a mature determination of performativity appears in *Gender Trouble* following a discussion of the genealogical opening of subjectivity within *Discipline and Punish*. To quote this passage at length, Butler argues that:

... acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through the corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality (*GT*, 173).

Performativity designates that movement whereby identities and bodies are produced - are fabricated - in such a way that that fabrication itself is hidden and disavowed, and, further, that this hiding occurs through a reversal of internal cause and external effect. The crisis of temporality through which a subject is produced is registered here as a crisis of the boundaries of the subject, of the boundaries which will mark the proper interior and exterior of a subject.<sup>27</sup> As a political concept and a political practice, performativity brings into itself the entire Foucaultian inheritance of subjectivity as the productive logic of desire and bodies, a production without outside, that establishes a temporal and spatial outside as its very concealment.

With this we arrive at what would seem to be the full political overcoming of the metaphysical. Arising as a designation for the logic of an inherited metaphysics of substance, performativity is here argued to undo the very ontological status of the subject which would seem to be necessitated within metaphysics as that has developed since Descartes, and so to undo metaphysics itself. This is, though, to move too quickly. For the very term fabrication should give pause here. Fabrication can designate both an illusion and a production, and it is only if

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<sup>27</sup> Jessica Cadwallader, "How Judith Butler Matters," *Australian Feminist Studies* 24, no. 60 (June 2009): 290.

fabrication is read as the ground of illusion that it is possible to quickly move to the abandonment of metaphysics. Yet the entire movement of Butler's deployment of Foucault seems to move against just such a reading of fabrication. The genealogical critique of identity, the genealogical critique of subjectivity enacted in and through performativity, displays not an illusion, *per se*, but rather a production, the production of subjects. Specifically, it is not that the subject has no ontological status, but rather that the subject has no ontological status beyond or before the acts of its constitution, its fabrication.

### 3. Metaphysical Performances

Nearly two decades after being introduced in *Gender Trouble*, performativity remains one of the most important critical concepts for the thought and practice of radical democracy. Although performativity is not fully developed until the third chapter of *Gender Trouble*, and then further refined in *Bodies That Matter* and *Excitable Speech*, it arises in the opening chapter of *Gender Trouble* within a discussion of metaphysics. Because of the politics that is made possible through its developments and refinements, the fact that performativity first arises within a discussion of identity and metaphysics, and so arises within and as a metaphysical concept, is often forgotten. Yet this is precisely how performativity is first determined in *Gender Trouble*:

In this sense, *gender* is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be (*GT*, 33).

Within this first fundamental announcement of the concept, performativity designates a metaphysical logic of production. Gender performativity is determined as the productivity within an inherited metaphysical discourse: the movement by which identity is produced within a metaphysics of substance. Within this metaphysic, Butler argues, identity, and here she means

specifically gendered identity (although we must also recognize that performativity will come to be a force of subjection in general, even if this is not quite a theory of subjectivity), is produced through a compulsive binding together. In the case of gendered identity, this is a binding together of a certain set of attributes (the set of attributes that are announced in the title of the first chapter of *Gender Trouble*: sex, gender, and desire), bound together with and as the body. This binding is then completed in and through its insistence as the foundational essence of identity itself. Performativity, then, designates a doubled productivity that occurs within or possibly even as a metaphysics of substance: a productive binding of identity that is completed in and through the concealment of its production.<sup>28</sup>

It is possible to understand *Gender Trouble*, and the political critique it launches under the name of performativity, as itself producing a theory and practice for the unbinding of this production, the unbinding of identity, the subject and substance, as well as the unbinding of the political practices which remain bound within a metaphysics of substance. If we are to understand the political promise of performativity it is necessary, then, to begin within this metaphysical site of its arising, and, to the extent that the unbinding undertaken through performativity is not strictly an abandonment, to see that in its political and critical work performativity comes to undo the metaphysics of substance within which it arises. And it is this undoing from within that will determine the metaphysical site of performativity as the opened site of a political practice of subversion.<sup>29</sup>

If the metaphysical arising of performativity remains to be demonstrated, this demonstration will take place against the decidedly anti-metaphysical reception of performativity

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<sup>28</sup> Chambers and Carver, *Judith Butler and Political Theory*, 49.

<sup>29</sup> Chambers, “‘An Incalculable Effect,’” 659.

and Butler in general. Too often, and usually too quickly,<sup>30</sup> the critical and political unbinding of a metaphysics of substance, enacted as performativity is deployed within the history of a metaphysics of substance, is assumed to be an overcoming of metaphysics itself, an overcoming that renders the metaphysical arising of performativity invisible, or non-consequential. This performative overcoming of metaphysics is then given an intention, so that Butler herself is determined simply as anti-metaphysical.

In her introduction to Butler's thought, for example, and as we have already seen, Vicki Kirby notes the way in which Butler's early work in *Subjects of Desire* is not an attempt to "trump" Hegel and thereby overcome metaphysics, but is rather a political interrogation of Hegel's metaphysic to find "other worlds" to live in. Yet in moving to a reading of performativity and *Gender Trouble*, Kirby reduces Butler's engagement with metaphysics to the brief critique of a metaphysics of substance in the first chapter of *Gender Trouble*, arguing that this critique is representative of "a sustained criticism" of that metaphysic's "illusory appeal."<sup>31</sup> For Kirby, this sustained critique is an overcoming of metaphysics, an overcoming that allows performativity a political life of its own. Performativity is, in this instance, fundamentally and exclusively a political concept. It is only in enjoying a release from metaphysics, it seems, that performativity is allowed to develop as a political concept.

In a similar way, Christine Battersby, in attempting to develop a feminist metaphysic, and even while claiming a certain inspiration from Butler, determines the entirety of Butler's thought as anti-metaphysical.<sup>32</sup> In *The Phenomenal Woman*, Battersby first encounters Butler as a

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<sup>30</sup> In her introduction to Butler's thought, for example, Sara Salih first presents a discussion of performativity through a reading of the above quote. In doing so, though, she simply elides any mention of metaphysics from Butler's text. When she does provide the full quote a page later, she does so only to argue for the linguistic nature of performativity. See Salih, *Judith Butler*, 63-64.

<sup>31</sup> Kirby, *Judith Butler*, 27.

<sup>32</sup> Christine Battersby, *The Phenomenal Woman: Feminist Metaphysics and the Patterns of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 104.

(failed) reader of Irigaray. Battersby argues that this failure is occasioned by Butler's refusal to read Irigaray in an ontological register, instead "marshalling" her for her own epistemological project of undermining and rejecting identity.<sup>33</sup> With this fairly common determination of Butler's project as an epistemological undermining and rejection of identity,<sup>34</sup> Battersby is able to render Butler's appropriation of Irigaray's anti-metaphysical arguments as fundamentally flawed for not properly engaging the ontological level of Irigaray's own work. Rather than simply dismissing any metaphysical argumentation in Butler or *Gender Trouble*, Battersby argues that Butler's anti-metaphysical arguments, as drawn from Irigaray, fail precisely because they are not within the realm of proper metaphysical argumentation, where the epistemological is, apparently, outside the realm of metaphysics and finally separable from it.

In continuing her critique of Butler's anti-metaphysical stance, Battersby turns directly to Butler's deployment of Nietzsche's critique of substance in *Gender Trouble*. According to Battersby, Butler reads Nietzsche as calling for the rejection of metaphysics. For Battersby this is not the only, or even the most appropriate, reading of Nietzsche, to the extent that there is an ambiguity in Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics: it is possible, Battersby wants to argue, to read Nietzsche either as critiquing metaphysics *per se* or as simply critiquing certain elements of a metaphysics of substance. Yet Butler, according to Battersby, "determinedly resolves the ambiguity in Nietzsche's position as to whether Nietzsche is simply against a particular mode of metaphysics, or against metaphysics *per se*, and, instead, presents him as simply anti-

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> As Alison Stone argues, post-structuralism in America was often read, especially in its initial introduction, as a "suspension" of any and all ontological investigations in favor of a focus on representation. Although Stone offers this important reminder of the historical context of *Gender Trouble* and its moment within a history of theoretical development, she repeats the criticism of Butler as being concerned simply with representation. Stone achieves this argument by conflating discourse, as Butler develops this critical Foucaultian concept, and signification, signs, and language. See Alison Stone, "Towards a Genealogical Feminism: A Reading of Judith Butler's Political Thought," *Contemporary Political Theory* 4, no. 1 (February 1, 2005): 4-24.

metaphysical.”<sup>35</sup> Yet this presentation itself, for Battersby, seems to follow from an already established anti-metaphysical position. Butler, Battersby argues, takes up Nietzsche “in support of her anti-metaphysical stance...”<sup>36</sup> It seems here that Nietzsche, and his sustained critique of substance and metaphysics, is only a tool of an already established and taken anti-metaphysical stance. Butler is, then, fundamentally and prior to any encounter with metaphysics, anti-metaphysical.

The rendering of performativity, and the politics which Butler develops with performativity, as anti-metaphysical often takes place through a reduction of the argument in *Gender Trouble* to epistemology. In this regard it is obligatory to mention the most famous epistemological reduction of Butler and the political practice that is developed as performativity; namely, the critique that is presented by Martha Nussbaum in her review of Butler’s work, subtly titled “The Professor of Parody.”<sup>37</sup> Enough has been written concerning Nussbaum’s critique of the quietist politics that is the necessary outcome of Butler’s parodic feminism that there is no need to rehearse the debate or defend either of the participants.<sup>38</sup> Here it is enough to simply note that Nussbaum’s critique begins with a separation between representation and the concerns of “real women.”<sup>39</sup> Although these real women are nowhere clearly determined by Nussbaum, they are, it seems, ignored within the high theoretical and epistemological discourse that is, in Nussbaum’s rendering, simply a play of representation. This is, then, Nussbaum’s fundamental critique of Butler: the reduction of her political feminism to a simple play of and on words that eventuates in an ineffectual politics of parody. Butler has, according to Nussbaum, avoided

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<sup>35</sup> Battersby, 104.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, “The Professor of Parody: The hip defeatism of Judith Butler,” *The New Republic* Feb. 22, 1999, 34-45.

<sup>38</sup> For a recent defense of Butler on this point, see, Moya Lloyd, *Beyond Identity Politics: Feminism, Power and Politics* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2005), 147-148.

<sup>39</sup> Nussbaum, “Professor of Parody,” 38.

everything, in exchange for a simple play of signification. Although, as we will see in what follows, Nussbaum's critique severely misses the mark, her argument remains important for highlighting the stakes at issue. For Nussbaum recognizes, even within a fallacious differential between representation and real women, and even against her own reading, that representation is never simply a play on or of words, but that representation has political consequences, and so, in a more general philosophical discourse, does epistemology.<sup>40</sup> Against her own reading, then, Nussbaum requires that we take all of Butler seriously if we are to take her politics seriously.

Although we should and will question the reduction of Butler's argument in *Gender Trouble* to epistemology, or, for that matter, to any other simple and well demarcated discursive domain, it is also necessary to recognize that if these critiques of Butler are, generally, attempts to read in or into Butler an overcoming of the metaphysical, they are not, for that, entirely spurious readings. Within the movement of *Gender Trouble* itself it may seem that the overcoming of metaphysics is necessary for the political efficacy of performativity to emerge. When compared to the determination of performativity that arises within the pivotal third chapter of *Gender Trouble*, and that is developed in *Bodies that Matter* and *Excitable Speech*, the initial determination of performativity as the logic of identity production in a metaphysics of substance appears as quite abstract. Performativity is here, as Slavoj Žižek might argue, overly formalist as a metaphysical concept.<sup>41</sup> In this brief opening announcement, where performativity designates the doubled metaphysical logic of identity production, first as a compelled synthesis through which an identity is produced as a subject, and second as the dissimulation by which this

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<sup>40</sup> The reading of Butler that follows will continue to explore the connections between epistemology, ontology and politics. Much of the present exploration follows the work of Veronica Vasterling, who presents a nuanced understanding of the relation between ontology, epistemology and politics.

<sup>41</sup> In their published conversation, Butler, Žižek and Laclau engage in a play of formalisms, accusing each other, at various points, of being closet formalists. For Žižek's accusation that both Laclau and Butler are Kantian formalists, see his contribution "Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, please!" in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, 90-135.

synthesis is completed in being posited as the essential ground of identity itself, it seems that an elaboration of the historically specific productions of identity are not and cannot be critically engaged. Either performativity as a metaphysical concept can be applied in any and every situation and so is politically vacuous, or it is transcendently abstracted from any concrete situation, and so is rendered politically ineffective. On this reading of performativity and *Gender Trouble* it will take the entirety of *Gender Trouble* and beyond to begin to determine performativity so that it can become an analytic and critical concept for the undoing of specific, concrete, historical determinations of identity. It must, it seems, suffer the historical (SD, 231), and so become a genealogical concept. And it is this genealogical determination of performativity that is necessary for performativity to become a politically efficacious concept. The genealogical historicization of performativity is then necessary to enact a critique of the material and political practices by which gender identities are produced, and to open these productive practices to the possibility of contestation. Within this reading of performativity, and the movement from the first chapter of *Gender Trouble* to *Bodies That Matter* and *Excitable Speech*, the development of performativity from an overly formal metaphysical concept that designates the logical productivity of a metaphysics of substance to a genealogical concept – a political analytic and practice – occurs as performativity undoes the site of its own metaphysical arising and overcomes this metaphysical site.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> This discussion is complicated, on the one hand, by the fact that, when addressing these concerns, Butler and her critics often speak of theory and not metaphysics, so that her political thought, it is argued, is troubled by a theoretical formalism, rather than, strictly, a metaphysical formalism. On the other hand, Butler has already, in the “Preface” to the 1999 edition of *Gender Trouble*, complicated the apparent need to historicize theory, as theory is, and we must say the same for metaphysics, always already historical. As she argues, “There is a new venue for theory, necessarily impure, where it emerges in and as the very event of cultural translation. This is not the displacement of theory by historicism, nor a simple historicization of theory that exposes the contingent limits of its more generalizable claims. It is, rather, the emergence of theory at the site where cultural horizons meet, where the demand for translation is acute and its promise of success, uncertain” (ix). Similarly, in “The Question of Social Transformation” Butler likewise insists on a certain reading of theory as a practice that is already implicated in political and social transformation (In *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004, 204).) Although a fuller



It is only against and within these movements of thought that it is possible to return again to the metaphysical arising of performativity within the first chapter of *Gender Trouble*.

Although I have tried, already, to insist on a specific metaphysical arising of performativity, the above passage is not the first appearance of performativity within *Gender Trouble*. Embedded within an earlier discussion of the law, Butler argues (to quote her at length) that:

[j]uridical power inevitably “produces” what it claims merely to represent; hence, politics must be concerned with this dual function of power: the juridical and the productive. In effect, the law produces and then conceals the notion of “a subject before the law” in order to invoke that discursive formation as a naturalized foundational premise that subsequently legitimates that law’s own regulatory hegemony.... Perhaps the subject, as well as the invocation of a temporal “before,” is constituted by the law as the fictive foundation of its own claim to legitimacy... The performative invocation of a nonhistorical “before” becomes the foundational premise that guarantees a presocial ontology of persons who freely consent to be governed and, thereby, constitute the legitimacy of the social contract (*GT*, 5).

Even while noting that this is the first mention of the performative production of the subject, there is much in this brief passage to be unpacked. First is the relation that is proposed here between the law and power. There is, it seems, a certain confusion between power and the law, as the passage begins with a discussion of “juridical power,” which then is read as “power,” before concluding with a determination of the subject as standing “before the law.” Butler is, one might be tempted to argue, quite confused by these various enactments of order.<sup>43</sup> Certainly, a full articulation of the relations between law and power has been a continual concern of Butler’s in her thinking through the political site of the subject. Although we will return to this

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articulation of the metaphysical as it may emerge through and after Butler must wait until a reading of Whitehead, here it can be noted that it is not, strictly, that theory or metaphysics must be politicized or historicized, but that the historical emergence of theory and metaphysics must be acknowledged as the already present condition of its enunciation.

<sup>43</sup> Kirsten Campbell gives into this temptation, arguing, as a generalization drawn from a review of *Antigone’s Claim*, that Butler often seems to fail to provide a clear delineation of the critical concepts she works within. See Kirsten Campbell, “The Politics of Kinship.” *Economy and Society* 31, no.4 (Nov. 2002): 642-650. As will be argued this ‘failure’ may itself be politically necessary and strategic.

relation in following chapters, it is important to note that a full and final articulation of this relation may not yet be fully articulated or articulatable by Butler.<sup>44</sup> Yet this may, of course, be itself a first determination of the polyvalent movements of power, and not an analytic failure. What might be at stake, in other words, is the very confusing of its enactments that allows power its efficacy. As we will see, power can be said in many ways.

Of immediate interest, though, is the determination of the performative invocation of the subject as an ontological movement, an ontological movement that concerns the temporal production of an historical subject, and the retroactive invocation which completes this temporalizing production as nonhistorical and legally binding. First, this threefold determination of a performative invocation of the subject should already complicate any easy distinctions between the epistemological, the ontological and the political. Proposed here is not only an analytic of the historical production of the subject, but an analytic of the historical production of the subject as a temporalized being. This is, then, a doubled temporalization of the ontological becoming of the subject. Further, the temporalized subject does not simply arise as an ontological production, but as a production in and under the name of legal guilt. The ontological, here, is always, and quite possibly already, political. Finally, it is an essential practice of this production to regulate that which can appear and be hidden; that which can, in other words, be known or remain unknown. As we will see and have already seen, this regulation of intelligibility and recognition is central to Butler's political thought. Here she is at her most Hegelian, arguing both that the determination of being is a determination of

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<sup>44</sup> On the one hand, the closest Butler comes to a full articulation of this relation is to be found in "Gender Regulations" (In *Undoing Gender*, 40-56). It may be necessary to admit, when we come to explore this relation directly, that no final articulation is possible to the extent that the relations that are enacted as and within power are always both multiple and, precisely, enactments of the law. This will mean that finally neither power nor the law, nor the norms through which and with which power and the law work, can be finalized as separated from their enactments.

recognition, and that to know oneself as a subject through recognition is to become oneself as a subject. For now, it is enough to note the extent to which this passage complicates any over-determination of performativity as *simply* epistemological, as the epistemological is already implicated by the ontological, which is itself already implicated by the political. In this brief passage, then, is an argument that the ontological, the epistemological and the political are always implicated in and by each other, so that any distinctions we may want, for analytic purposes, to establish between the three will be anything but simple.

It is in the mutual implication of these domains and the subsequent blurring of these otherwise clearly demarcated lines between epistemology, ontology and politics that performativity arises necessarily as a metaphysical concept. Only as a metaphysical concept can performativity begin to unravel the multiple determinations of identity that occur through epistemological, ontological and political discourses. It is, in other words, precisely as within a metaphysics of substance that epistemology, ontology and politics operate to produce simple subjects of being. In this economy of subject production, a simple subject is produced as a bound unity. With this, a metaphysic of substance determines the limits of being as known, as actual, and as politically possible. By determining substance and subjectivity as simple unity, a metaphysics of substance establishes the epistemic and ontological grounds of political possibility as that which is unified, as the simple singular, enacting as metaphysical necessity the demand of conversion. It is precisely, as we will see, to undo this bound unity that performativity is deployed within and as a metaphysical concept.

In the first chapter of *Gender Trouble* Butler begins to open the overlain determinations of a metaphysics of substance and a politics of unity, as these relations move through

epistemology and ontology. The section begins with a superficially epistemological concern,<sup>45</sup> as does the entire opening section of *Gender Trouble*, exploring the interconnection between three totalizing theoretical gestures. First, a “monological masculinist economy” of signification, designated as “imperialist”; second, a phallogocentrism, designated as “colonizing”; and third, a universalist identity claim, designated as “globalizing.” Each of these theoretical gestures - the imperialist, the colonizing, and the globalizing - is epistemological: each constitutes a signifying practice by which gender is known within the capture of a singular logic of being (*GT*, 18-19). The imperialist epistemological gesture is constituted by an amplification of a local economy of gender production such that any and all gender production is understood as taking place within or as a variant of that singular economy of production. The colonizing epistemological gesture is an “appropriative act,” whereby any encountered difference of being is brought into the same through a practice of totalizing signification. The globalizing epistemological gesture grounds universalistic identity claims through the positing of a shared, or common, structural world, either the world of structural oppression or structural gender identity.

In each of these, though, the epistemological gesture is itself predicated on while also being productive of an ontology of unity, of singular being. To know a singular, unified gender identity in each of these signifying practices is to, at the same time, insist on the being of a singular, unified gender through these signifying practices. And it is this very insistence that constitutes, in these early movements of *Gender Trouble*, the political, the entry into the standing

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<sup>45</sup> Although Butler’s concerns in “Theorizing the Binary, the Unitary, and Beyond” begins with epistemic concerns, it is specifically the *beyond* that must be kept in mind. For beyond these epistemological concerns lies the metaphysical concerns of “Identity, Sex, and the Metaphysics of Substance,” as well as *Bodies That Matter*. The former indicates that the epistemological concerns at present are concerned with their own movement within and into a metaphysics of substance, laying the ground for the undoing of that same metaphysic. The latter, which will be discussed further in ch. 3, is Butler’s most serious meditation on the materiality of language, a meditation which leads to a problematizing of the relation between epistemology and ontology.

of what is through these gestures precisely as gestures, as signifying practices. But these are not simply, or not only, signifying gestures, as if we could return to a philosophical scene where representation was itself simply a dematerialized, dehistoricized idealization. On the one hand, these signifying gestures occur within and as the enunciation of a “matrix of intelligibility” that is itself grounded in and by the unity of “substance” (*GT*, 24-25). If this substantial matrix of intelligibility is itself announced within and as a heterosexual economy of sex, gender and desire, it is its being grounded in and by substance that allows this matrix to insist itself into the various domains of its appearance (*GT*, 25). It is, in other words, precisely as being determined within a metaphysics of substance that a heterosexual matrix of intelligibility can come to determine the appearance of sex, gender, and desire as what can be known, what can be, and what can be practiced. So it is that in the final chapter of *Gender Trouble*, this inter-insistence of the epistemological, ontological, and political is precisely what is at stake in the determination of identity as the political name for substance as the contested site of politics itself (*GT*, 183-184). And it is this inter-insistence that is determined as the regulatory practices of normative heterosexuality, a normativity that requires and produces a unity of being in and as a sexed and gendered identity. What appears, then, as beginning with and as an epistemological concern quickly moves into and becomes enmeshed within ontological and political contestations.

At stake in these epistemological analyses’ of *Gender Trouble*, then, is not simply the epistemological itself, nor even the ontological, but rather the connection between the epistemological, the ontological, and the political. This is, though, to neither reduce nor judge epistemology or ontology by their political deployments. Rather, Butler is interested in articulating the discourses and practices through which the epistemological, ontological, and political determinations of gender and subjectivity operate, opening to analysis the often

occluded epistemic and ontological operations of political practices. “To what extent,” Butler asks,

do *regulatory practices* of gender formation and division constitute identity, the internal coherence of the subject, indeed, the self-identical status of the person? To what extent is ‘identity’ a normative ideal rather than a descriptive feature of experience? And how do the regulatory practices that govern gender also govern culturally intelligible notions of identity? In other words, the ‘coherence’ and ‘continuity’ of ‘the person’ are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility (*GT*, 23, emphasis in original).

This is the opening up to analysis of the reciprocal relations, enacted through regulatory practices, between the signifying practices of epistemological determination and the ontological becoming of subjects, a reciprocity within which the political is practiced. And it is, as we have seen, that these regulative practices arise within a metaphysics of substance such that the epistemic, ontological, and political practice is determined as a practice of unity. Within a metaphysics of substance, these become practices which demand in their enactment a unitary and singular identity as the possibility of being. Once these reciprocal determinations and practices are opened up Butler is able to turn to an opening of metaphysics itself, arguing that the insistence of unity is an insistence of metaphysics. It is then a metaphysical demand for unity which will ultimately be seen to undergird and demand unity at the ontological, epistemological, and political levels.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Although Butler’s political thought begins within a reading of Hegelian metaphysics, and continually returns to this originary site, here, in *Gender Trouble*, Butler is concerned principally with what she designates as a metaphysics of substance. As argued in the introduction and assumed throughout the present discussion, in Butler’s insistence on the productive practices of thought and metaphysics another history of metaphysics can be developed, one in which metaphysics does not describe the world, but rather produces simple and singular unity of the world and the demand for a unity of and in the world as the ideal of Being. Whether the production of unity occurs under the name of Spirit or substance becomes, then, less important than the articulation of unity as a demand masquerading as the given of reality which comes to determine a subjectivity necessarily conforming to this simple unity.

The language within which performativity appears as arising within a metaphysics of substance comes from Butler's quick reading of Friedrich Nietzsche, as mediated through Michael Haar. Drawing on Nietzsche, Haar determines as "constructs" of grammar the "illusions" of Being and Substance.<sup>47</sup> As ontological descriptions, Being and Substance are illusions to the extent that they claim to designate an ontological reality that exists outside of and prior to being designated.<sup>48</sup> These illusions receive their force of effect in that they are drawn from and mimic a subject-predicate grammar. This is, for Haar, the crux of the Nietzschean critique of a metaphysics of substance: the genealogical unearthing of the illusory status of Being and Substance, an illusion that is determined and maintained by a faith in subject-predicate grammar. Further, Butler argues, it is, in the very act of being determined as ontological realities that these illusions produce the ontological necessity of simplicity, order, and identity (*GT*, 27). The metaphysics of substance, then, which finds its ground of being in the mutual determination of Being and Substance, rather than being determined by the necessities of simplicity, order, and identity, a necessity deriving from the logical demands of Being and Substance, produces that very necessity in the determination of Being and Substance, a necessity which is itself no longer the necessity of metaphysics or Being or Substance, but of grammar.

Beyond the direct critique of a metaphysics of substance, a critique which provides Butler with her own language for engaging metaphysics, of greater importance here is the movement whereby this critique becomes a critique of the psychological person. When, in other words, Nietzsche is returned to what Butler takes to be the founding scene of the substantive subject: the Cartesian *ego*. With this return, where the logic of a metaphysics of substance as the self-positing of Being, is opened within the genealogical critique of Nietzsche, when the movement,

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<sup>47</sup> Michel Haar, "Nietzsche and Metaphysical Language," in *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, ed. David Allison (New York: Delta, 1985), 17; as quoted in *Gender Trouble*, 27.

<sup>48</sup> Chambers and Carver, *Judith Butler and Political Theory*, 44.

in other words, of the circular self-grounding of a metaphysics of substance is suspended in being designated precisely as an illusory deed, then both the subject which thinks itself through this self-referential productive language and the metaphysics which arises from it and is grounded in this produced subject are suspended and undone from within their own movement. The Cartesian *ego* which posits itself as the cause of its own thoughts is now seen to be the effect of thought thinking itself through grammar. “It was grammar (the structure of subject and predicate),” Butler quotes Haar as arguing, “that inspired Descartes’ certainty that ‘I’ is the subject of ‘think,’ whereas it is rather the thoughts that come to ‘me’: at bottom, faith in grammar simply conveys the will to be the ‘cause’ of one’s thoughts. The subject, the self, the individual are just so many false concepts, since they transform into substances fictitious unities having at the start only a linguistic reality.”<sup>49</sup> The Cartesian grounding of metaphysics becomes caught in its own desire for unity, a unity of substance that will secure a knowledge that will become, with the assistance of a verifying God, the total capture of being in a simple subjectivity.<sup>50</sup> The unity of metaphysics is now determined, on the one hand, through its effect of producing a unitary subject, and, on the other, through its being grounded in a theological grammar of unity. The Nietzschean genealogical critique is appropriated by Butler for making visible not only the illusion of this doubled production – the production of a substantive subject which is also the principle for grounding metaphysics – but for announcing the logic by which this illusion is produced.

The certainty of a metaphysics of substance is grounded in and by the production of the substantive subject, a subject that is produced to ground the certainty of its own being. And it is in order to avoid the self-enclosure of this metaphysical trap that Butler appropriates Nietzsche

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<sup>49</sup> Haar, “Nietzsche and Metaphysical Language,” 17-18; as quoted in *Gender Trouble*, 28.

<sup>50</sup> See the introduction for a brief unfolding of this Cartesian grounding of metaphysics.



directly, arguing for the need to explore the Nietzschean claim that “There is no ‘being’ behind doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything.”<sup>51</sup> It is precisely within this Nietzschean claim that Butler finds a summative determination of the relation between performativity and a metaphysics of substance.<sup>52</sup> It is the performativity of gender in its functioning that creates the appearance of a doer behind the deed of gender, the appearance of a gender identity and a sexed being behind the expressions that are its effects (*GT*, 33). With this performativity designates the deed which is everything.

It is with the undoing of this deed that we return to the first appearance of performativity in *Gender Trouble*. Here, the movement that is designated as a performative invocation of the subject is the deed of this becoming substantive subject, a deed that is, in its formal structure, similar to the metaphysical determination of the performative production of identity. In both cases the subject, or the subject as that which is brought under a singular identity, is first produced, and then retroactively invoked as the preceding ground of that produced subject. In both cases performativity designates a logic of dissimulation whereby a subject that is produced is invoked as and through a naturalized foundation. Where performativity is determined as a metaphysical concept, the synthetic production is a bringing together of a set of attributes which are predicated of an already abiding substance that is the production of that synthetic act. In this first, onto-political determination of the performative invocation of the subject, the production is a temporalization, bringing into being an ahistorical subject who is to stand before the law, and so will be called to stand before a temporality of guilt as an already guilty subject.<sup>53</sup> Reading

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<sup>51</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage, 1969), 45; as quoted in *Gender Trouble*, 33.

<sup>52</sup> Maya Lloyd, *Judith Butler: From Norms to Politics* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007), 42.

<sup>53</sup> Butler more fully explores the production of the subject as a production that takes place before and in the service of the law in *The Psychic Life of Power*. A further exploration of both the guilty-temporality of subjection will be entered into in chapter 3.

these two together, then, it is possible to argue that performativity designates that logic – either ontological or metaphysical – of temporality and being, a logic that is, as the immediate passage indicates, a logic of law and guilt before the law.

Beginning with *Gender Trouble*, then, it is this twisted productivity that Butler means to designate as performativity, a determination of performativity that will not alter, even as this twisting is complicated in its development.<sup>54</sup> In *The Psychic Life of Power* Butler will attempt to think this twisted productivity together with the performative invocation of a subject before the law as a twisting of psychic power, but here, at this point in the first chapter of *Gender Trouble*, and as a continuation of what has already been seen, this twisted logic is a metaphysical logic that produces subjects through a grammatical twist productive of temporal causation.

Temporality, then, is itself twisted, both as a temporal production and as a production of the temporal. In a performative twist, that which has come to appear is twisted to become the substantive being which will ground its own appearance, and so will be caught in the temporality of its own production. With this we seem to return to the metaphysical arising of performativity: as a metaphysical production, performativity is the twisted logic of the production of identity as a binding that hides its own productivity.

#### 4. The Risk of Abstraction

Performativity is not simply, or not only, an analytic and critical concept for thinking through the production of subjects within a metaphysics of substance. It is also an analytic for thinking through and with a variety of otherwise heterogeneous critical theorists. In other words, the twisted logic of performativity takes on a certain abstraction through which Butler is able to construct her own critical discourse. As Butler argues in *Gender Trouble*, in the midst of

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<sup>54</sup> Chambers and Carver, *Judith Butler and Political Theory*, 39.

exploring a series of “French feminist” and “poststructuralist” accounts of the production of gender and sex,<sup>55</sup> “central to each of these views... is the notion that sex appears within hegemonic language as a *substance*, as, metaphysically speaking, a self-identical being. This appearance is achieved through a performative twist of language and/or discourse that conceals the fact that ‘being’ a sex or a gender is fundamentally impossible” (*GT*, 25). To speak of performativity as a metaphysical concept is, then, to speak within a certain abstraction, an abstraction that is able to bring together a set of otherwise quite diverse discourses.<sup>56</sup> Specifically, in this case, a metaphysical abstraction of performativity is a way of investigating the possibility of developing an analytic of power as the production of substance within and through the work of Irigaray, Wittig, and Foucault. Each of these discourses provides a distinct articulation of the field of power within which substance is produced as sexed and/or gendered subjectivity, and yet the metaphysical determination of performativity can be deployed to think through them in order to think power and the production of subjects (*GT*, 25). The metaphysical abstraction of performativity becomes a way to think with and through these otherwise disparate discourses, so that the metaphysical determination of performativity is itself an abstraction arising out of and through the disjunctive possibilities of these diverse discourses.

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<sup>55</sup> As Butler herself notes in the 1999 “Preface” to *Gender Trouble*, the designation “French Theory,” which is often used to describe *Gender Trouble*, is a decidedly American invention, bringing together a set of discourses that are very rarely, if ever, read together in France. It is, as Butler remarks, an “intellectually promiscuous” text. (*GT*, x).

<sup>56</sup> As we will see, this metaphysical abstraction must be kept quite distinct from a more substantial metaphysical abstraction that Butler, in *Subjects of Desire*, critiques Kojève of falling into in his determination of desire. This is, as Butler argues, an abstraction that transcends “the purely sensuous,” rendering the figure of the subject as “a metaphysical abstraction rather than a concrete existential situation” with the effect that Kojève “deprives his [subject] of an *embodied* understanding of desire” (*SD*, 70, emphasis in original). In this substantial sense of metaphysical abstraction, the abstract is a level of metaphysical truth that transcends both the material but also the historical becoming of concrete actuality.

Metaphysics, as an abstraction in this sense, may become, as Butler is aware, a risk.<sup>57</sup> Although Butler is willing to risk this metaphysical abstraction in order to think with and through a differentiated set of theoretical determinations of power and the production of sexed and gendered subjects, and so to also think with and through the political articulations of productive power, she continually announces a hesitation, a stammering that is a necessary mode of all risk,<sup>58</sup> when encountering the possibility and demand to think with and through the productivity of multiplied subject positions. In this sense, a metaphysical abstraction may come to determine all productivity, such that all logics of subject production – understood now as a productive structuring of power - will be reduced to one metaphysical logic, to enter again into colonizing and imperialist theoretical practices.

In the concluding chapter of *Gender Trouble*, this stammering is the hesitancy of thinking through the “embarrassing” horizontal proliferation of subject positions (*GT*, 128), a hesitancy that continues in *Bodies That Matter* through a direct engagement with racialized subject productions (*BM*, 18-19 & 167-185). In the “Introduction” to *Bodies That Matter* Butler announces three reasons for her hesitancy in thinking racialized subject productions as analogous to sexed and gendered subject productions. First, to privilege one logic of production will be to discount and devalue other logics of production, a critical fear that rests on the assumption that these logics are already distinct. Second, in order to privilege one logic of production it would be necessary to discount the exclusions by which this production is privileged, assuming that the abstraction of one logic as a universal logic is given without the necessary work of becoming universal. Finally, this privileging of one logic of production would perform a certain epistemic

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<sup>57</sup> Isabelle Stengers, “Beyond Conversation: The Risks of Peace,” in *Process and Difference: Between Cosmological and Poststructuralist Postmodernisms*, eds. Catherine Keller and Anne Daniell, SUNY Series in Constructive Postmodern Thought, ed. David Ray Griffin (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002), 235-255.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

imperialism, capturing and encompassing unto itself every movement a power, offering an impossibly pure reflection of the complexity of the world (*BM*, 18-19).

This risk, though, is not strictly speaking a risk to be avoided. Anticipating the arguments that will become central to her political thought,<sup>59</sup> in both *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter* Butler announces the risk of metaphysical failure and contestation as a productive risk. In the 1999 “Preface” to *Gender Trouble*, this productive risk is registered as the productivity of the necessary continual iteration of theory itself, announcing as the fundamental question of performativity’s trans-discursive possibility: “what happens to the theory when it tries to come to grips with race” (*GT*, xvi)? In this first instance, then, if metaphysical abstraction is the means of this trans-discursive possibility, the risk of failure is also the risk of political possibility: the risk of performativity’s alteration in and as a response to its analytic failure. This risk is more fully elaborated in the Introduction to *Bodies That Matter*, when it is a question of the production of racialized subjects. Here a productive risk is opened at the moment any theory of productive power fails to totalize the field of power, thereby opening itself up to the internal differences occasioned by its historical production (*BM*, 18-19). Performativity as a metaphysical concept, then, must always risk an internal differentiation that will rend its abstraction from within. And it is precisely within this space that a new political figure of power will emerge. This failure to totalize the field of power will arise through contestation, and so it is a failure that gives rise to a series of claims concerning the reality of power itself, a “way of reconfiguring what will count as the world” (*BM*, 19). The abstract will also become abstract, and in this very becoming abstract be open to contestation. This then is to open to metaphysics a

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<sup>59</sup> As will be seen in chapter 3, central to Butler’s recent political thought is the argument that radical democracy is the practice of this risk, the risk that comes with and through the claim of the universal. It is precisely in claiming the universal where it has yet to be acknowledged that the universal itself is altered.

process of becoming abstract, a becoming abstract that will always and only arise as contested and contestation.

To determine performativity as a metaphysical logic, then, is to also determine performativity as an abstraction. This abstraction will always remain as a logic of production arising out of the production of sexed and gendered identities within a metaphysics of substance. Yet it is not, in this sense, a simple, already universal logic of production. The question of abstraction is not, in this sense, whether it can, as an abstraction, be analytically deployed in any and every context as a totalizing explanation. It is rather an abstraction for entering into, for thinking through and with the productive movement of power in the determination of subjects. And in this, in its movement to and through other discourses, other movements of power, other productions, it is always placed at risk, put into the risk of its own differentiation, and its own alteration. The question of abstraction then is always a question of what happens to the abstraction. What happens to the universal when it is put to work in becoming what it has not been?

##### 5. The unbound and the undone: the political and the theological

To this point, I have tried to establish a certain metaphysical reading of Butler's political project. This is not to argue that Butler is a metaphysician, or that her project is a metaphysical project. Rather, the argument has been that Butler's political project arises as an unbinding of the metaphysical demand of unity, and so arises within and as an unbinding of the metaphysical production of substance as unified being. Political critique, then, is always, Butler proposes, a movement of unbinding that occurs within the various contexts of its arising. Politics is, in this sense, subversive. This is, as we have seen, the key accomplishment of performativity as a political concept: to arise within a metaphysics of substance in order to and as the unbinding of

that metaphysical production, the metaphysical production of a synthesized and unified subject. As a political concept it is, in this sense, matched by a Nietzschean critique of substance, so that Butler's appropriation of the Nietzschean claim that "there is no doer behind the deed" is at once a political articulation of a metaphysical claim. And this political-metaphysical claim is one which is concerned with an undoing of the temporality of the production of a unified subject.

If this attempt to read Butler as one who always remains close to metaphysics is shocking, it will be even more shocking to recognize that Butler's political work is enacted within and alongside a theological critique.<sup>60</sup> This shock is only recently drawing attention.<sup>61</sup> Yet one of the most consistent elements within Butler's work is her theological critique. This theological critique is directed not against theology *per se*, but against the theological determination of secular theoretical positions.<sup>62</sup> It is, we might say, a subversive critique, one which is deployed to open certain possibilities within theo-retical discourse, without rejecting those discourses. The theological will then mark a certain closure of and within theoretical discourses. It is within this theological critique that the movement from a subversion of metaphysics to a subversive politics is played out as and within a religious discourse. Although

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<sup>60</sup> This is especially true with the recent appearance of "Critique, Coercion, and Sacred Life in Benjamin's 'Critique of Violence.'" (In *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-secular World*. Ed. Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 201-219.) Further references to "Critique, Coercion and Sacred Violence," will appear in text, indicated by "CC" where necessary.). A close reading of this piece will take place in chapter 3. Here, it is important to note that this article is a strong argument for the subversive nature of Butler's theological critique, where in the divine force itself, as a divine violence, takes into itself a subversive practice of unbinding the law that has been enacted in its name.

<sup>61</sup> *Bodily Citations*, the most thorough engagement with Butler by a group of religious scholars, barely mentions this critique, taking up Butler to further a religious discourse in other, feminist and political, realms. See *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler*, eds. Ellen T. Armour and Susan M. St. Ville (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). Given Butler's own recent being drawn into religious and theological questions, we should be willing to give the religious and theological dimensions of her work more attention. In addition to "Critique, Coercion, and Sacred Life in Benjamin's 'Critique of Violence,'" see also her contributions to *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, eds. Jonathan van Antwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury and Free Speech*, The Townsend Papers in the Humanities (Doreen B. Townsend Center for the Humanities, UC Berkeley, 2009); and *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* New York: Verso, 2009.

<sup>62</sup> Adam Kotsko, "The Failed Divine Performative: Reading Judith Butler's Critique of Theology with Anselm's *Fall of the Devil*," *The Journal of Religion* 88, no. 2 (April 2008): 210.

it will be necessary to provide a genealogy of the political subject as theo-political subject, a genealogy that is only begun in the Introduction, here it becomes necessary to follow through the metaphysical-political subversion of the subject as a theological critique, as a means of concluding the present investigation and providing the necessity for the investigation to come.

We can begin to determine Butler's theological critique by again turning to the first chapter of *Gender Trouble* and its brief engagement with Lacan, post-Lacanian feminists, and materialist feminists. Here Butler draws three principles that must guide any critical political thought of sexual difference and sexed subject positions: first, a recognition of "the constructed status of sexual difference," second, a recognition of "the inherent instability of that construction," and finally, a recognition of "the dual consequentiality of a prohibition that at once institutes a sexual identity and provides for the exposure of that construction's tenuous ground" (*GT*, 37). Of greatest import is the latter realization as the culmination of the first two: the realization that the constructed nature of sexual difference is also the possibility of that difference being positioned differently. But this possibility rests not simply on the fact that sexual difference is constructed (which, as Butler argues in *Bodies That Matter*, leads to a shallow understanding of construction as humanist freedom (*BM*, 6)), but rather that constructions are always open to failure and are never fully efficacious. This understanding of the failure of the productive movement of power will be developed through and with Derrida in thinking through the citationality of performativity,<sup>63</sup> but here Butler begins to explore the failure of the construction of sexual difference in and through Lacan and post-Lacanian feminists.<sup>64</sup> In this context, it is not citational iteration that opens the possibility of constructing sexual

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<sup>63</sup> Gill Jagger, *Judith Butler: Sexual Politics, Social Change, and the Power of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 44.

<sup>64</sup> Although Butler draws, in *Gender Trouble*, a first determination of the Law as open to failure from Lacan and post-Lacanian feminists, it is to avoid the religious determination of that failure as necessary that she turns, in later works, to a Derridean notion of citationality to understand the opening of possibility in failure.



difference otherwise, but it is rather a theological critique which demands the recognition of an opening within the efficacy of the Law: “the paternal Law,” Butler argues, “ought to be understood not as a deterministic divine will, but as a perpetual bumbler, preparing the ground for the insurrections against him” (*GT*, 58). A strict binary seems to be posed, where a divine will, the will of a divine subject, a will that is fully efficacious in its intention, is opposed to and by an actualizing law, a law that is as it is enacted, a law without subject, but also a law that is a perpetual bumbler, a perpetual failure. As Lacan, or at least Butler’s Lacan, realizes, the Law of the Father is never fully efficacious: it is always stumbling in its actualizations, never able to fully bring about the sexed subjects which would fully fill its symbolic order into the historical. The actuality of the historical seems to be a bar that the Symbolic itself cannot pass intact. For Butler, then, the Law of the Father cannot and should not be figured as a fully efficacious divine will, a divine law which is able to fully execute itself within the historical, and so a divine law that has complete control of history, able to positively affect itself in history. The Law of the Father fails precisely in the prohibitive gap between its ideal structure and its actual appearance. Prohibition is, in the actualizing movement of the Law, the negativity through which possibility is opened.

This first theological critique of the Law, a critique that prohibits figuring the Law as either a subject, or as a fully efficacious will, provides an opening to possibility. At the same time it also leads to the need for a further theological critique. For if the Law is, in Lacan, a perpetual bumbler, this stumbling does not, Butler argues, challenge the Symbolic structure of sexual difference in or for Lacan. The stumbling Law of the Father, and precisely as a stumbling Law, forecloses on the possibility of challenging the Symbolic structure of its phantasmic order. Butler understands the Lacanian Symbolic as phantasmic to the extent that it is a never realizable

determination of sexual position.<sup>65</sup> This phantasm is produced through a set of rules that determine a disjunction between the Symbolic and its actual instantiation in any cultural moment (*GT*, 71). There are, then, two sets of rules at issue in Lacan: a first set of rules that structure the Symbolic distribution of sexed subject positions, and a second set of rules that necessitate the failure of the Law to actualize this structure in any historical moment. If, in Lacan, the latter set of rules opens a certain possibility for actualizing the Law differently, this does not, Butler argues, affect the first set of rules except as their very protection. As Butler argues, in a most strictly theological language,

This structure of religious tragedy in Lacanian theory effectively undermines any strategy of cultural politics to configure an alternative imaginary for the play of desires. If the Symbolic guarantees the failure of the tasks it commands, perhaps its purposes, like those of the Old Testament God, are altogether unteleological – not the accomplishment of some goal, but obedience and suffering to enforce the ‘subject’s’ sense of limitation ‘before the law’ (*GT*, 72).<sup>66</sup>

In other words, that the Law must necessarily fail solidifies, rather than challenges, the Symbolic structure of sexual difference precisely by placing that structure in a realm beyond challenge. The Law will necessarily fail precisely because the Symbolic will not change.

It is in being necessary that failure is religious, and so this necessity itself requires a second invocation of this first theological critique. In this Lacanian necessity of failure there is, Butler argues, a “romanticization or, indeed, a religious idealization of ‘failure,’ humility and limitation before the Law, which makes the Lacanian narrative ideologically suspect” (*GT*, 72). Even as the grammar here implies that it is simply in being religious that the narrative is ideologically suspect, the point is rather to articulate the religious idealization of the necessity of failure. This religious idealization of failure is precisely the rendering of failure as both

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<sup>65</sup> Kirby, *Judith Butler*, 79.

<sup>66</sup> It will remain, for now, an open question the extent to which this determination of the law of the God of the “Old Testament” might or might not also apply to the God of the Hebrew Bible.

necessary and as a failure of the historical, and so not a failure of the Symbolic/divine. This is to offer a certain return, as we will see, to an Augustinian logic of creation/conversion, in which historical existence is always already a failure, a failure precisely as historical, and a failure that requires the absolute surety of the divine and an absolute discipline before the divine/before the Law. In rendering the Law as a necessary failure, Lacan, at one and the same time, renders that failure as a necessary lack and incompleteness before the Law, and renders the Symbolic as inviolable, just as the divine will be rendered as absolute and complete being, at the greatest distance from a creation that is always already corrupted by the nothingness of creation.

In a final invocation of this first theological critique, one that is drawn from Nietzsche, the Lacanian Law is rendered as a law of “slave morality”: “the construction of the law,” Butler argues, “that guarantees failure is symptomatic of a slave morality that disavows the very generative powers it uses to construct the ‘Law’ as a permanent impossibility” (*GT*, 73). As Adam Kotsko argues, in a way that turns Butler’s own Nietzschean inheritance into a quasi-F Feuerbachian critique, Butler’s critique of Lacan is that “the subject, by participating in and thereby maintaining [the illusion of an immutable law], fails to recognize its own power. The Lacanian who resigns himself or herself to the inevitability of the Symbolic does not just decide not to waste energy on something impossible – in conceding the immutability of sexual difference, the Lacanian or theological subject lends his or her energy to the ongoing struggle against any reformulation of the Symbolic order.”<sup>67</sup> Caught in the logic of slave morality, the subject of failure becomes caught in the power of its own failure, defending, at all costs, the Symbolic necessity of failure itself. This is, fundamentally, to secure the immutability of the Symbolic through the distance of failure.

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<sup>67</sup> Kotsko, “The Failed Divine Performative,” 212.

There is, then, a first determination of Butler's theological critique as a critique that demands an understanding of the law as that which is open, but not necessarily so, to failure, and to locate in this failure not a sin but a possibility, a possibility of becoming other. Butler's second theological critique in *Gender Trouble* is directed more specifically at Lacan and Irigaray, and is also quite narrowly articulated. Continuing her engagement with the Lacanian determination of the Law of the Father, and the ways in which this determination of the Law has been encountered and twisted within post-Lacanian feminist thought, Butler argues that, even with these twists "'the paternal Law' in Lacan, as well as the monologic mastery of phallogocentrism in Irigaray, bear the mark of a monotheistic singularity that is perhaps less unitary and culturally universal than the guiding structuralist assumptions of the account presume" (*GT*, 38). As we have seen, the paternal law in Lacan is, for Butler, the law through which sexual difference and subject positions are established in Lacan, while the mastery of phallogocentrism is a reiteration of Butler's reading of Irigaray such that phallogocentrism is able to effect a total capture of being in Western metaphysical discourse, and so all discourse in the Western philosophical tradition. Both of these positions, Butler argues, propose a singular foundational logic of subject production, a singular economy of Law, a singular movement of power. On the one hand, this is, as we have already seen, the foundation of the colonial and imperialistic expansion of theory itself, as it moves from a specific location of arising to a universal capture of the productive field of power; what is seen as the productive movement of power in one moment is universalized to account for the movement of power itself as a theory of power.

On the other hand, and in this context, this is also a determination of subject production as always following a singular logic even in the production of multiplied subjectivities. As

Butler says, quite simply, in *Bodies That Matter*, “it would be a mistake to impose the same criteria on every cultural product” (*BM*, 19). In *Bodies That Matter*, the multiplication of subject positions is taken up as a challenge to Lacanian psychoanalysis directly in “Passing, Queering,” where Butler explores the relations between sexed, gendered, and raced subject productions in the work of Nella Larsen. This challenge requires, for Butler, a radical rethinking of the production of subject positions to account for the production of not only sexed and gendered subjects, but of raced, and sexed, and gendered subjects, where the relations between these determinations of the subject cannot be determined in advance.<sup>68</sup> If in *Bodies That Matter* this is registered specifically as a further critique of the limited determination of the Symbolic in Lacan, in *Gender Trouble* this theoretical gesture of singularity is not simply registered as a theoretical move, but is determined as a specifically theological move, as a monotheistic singularity. What is at stake in this second determination of her theological critique is, then, not a critique of a theologically determined figure of the subject as that which is, but rather a critique of a theological determination of the logic of power by which that subject comes to be. This is a critique, specifically, of any theoretical position that claims for itself either to be able to totalize the field of power through a singular logic, or to totalize the subject through its reductionist production by and within a singular determination of power, a theological avoidance of risk. For Butler the subject is always produced within a specific moment of power, and is always produced within multiple, unique movements of power. It is only as a theological determination that a theoretical position can determine power as singular, as existing within one *logos* of being.

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<sup>68</sup> As Butler argues in *Bodies That Matter*, “[w]hat requires radical rethinking is what social relations compose this domain of the symbolic, what convergent set of historical formations of racialized gender, of gendered race, of the sexualization of racial ideals, or the racialization of gender norms, makes up both the social regulation of sexuality and its psychic articulations” (182). As we will see, Butler’s failure to perform this radical rethinking, and so to escape a certain Lacanian monotheism is the reason for my own de-emphasis of the psychoanalytic side of Butler’s thought, and one of the reasons for the supplemental turn to Whitehead.

To the extent that this second theological critique is drawn back to Nietzsche (*GT*, 200, fn. 52),<sup>69</sup> we too are drawn back to Butler's deployment of Nietzsche's critique of substance such that in the density of these texts we begin to glimpse an onto-theological critique that is a political insistence within metaphysics of the opening to the productive becoming of subjectivity.

The second determination of Butler's theological critique dovetails into a third critique, one which takes as its concept of contestation the sovereign site of the Law and the subject. Immediately after determining the Law in Lacan and phallogocentrism in Irigaray as bearing the mark of a monotheistic singularity, Butler moves to reinvoke Foucault. This reinvocation is to enact a doubled intervention: first, to question the temporality within which the subject is produced and is said to exist, and second, to question the effective field of the Law's power. Here, Butler reiterates an argument that has already been seen, noting specifically that within Lacanian, post-Lacanian feminist, and materialist positions, a certain temporal outside to the Law is produced, an outside that is determined as either a site of resistance or utopian desire.<sup>70</sup> Within this agreement on an outside, the "location" of the temporal subject marks a disagreement between Lacanian and materialist feminisms. Here, Butler argues, the "quarrel seems to turn on the articulation of a temporal trope of a subversive sexuality that flourishes *prior* to the imposition of a law, *after* its overthrow, or during its reign as a constant challenge to its authority" (*GT*, 38). Yet, Butler argues, the performative twist within which the subject is produced is also a twisting of time itself, so that this before the law is produced as a ruse of power, the dissimulation of the productive history of the subject itself. As Butler argues, "the

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<sup>69</sup> It is only in a footnote that Butler begins to explore the monotheistic determination of this singularity of creation. On the one hand, it is to further articulate the genealogy of this subject that the introduction explores a metaphysics of conversion. See also Catherine Keller, in *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996) and *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (New York: Routledge, 2003) as providing the most sustained analysis of this mono-logic of creation.

<sup>70</sup> In *Subjects of Desire*, Butler designates this utopian time as a time that arises through a theological determination of history as marked by a Fall (*SD*, 217).

before' of the law and 'the after' are discursively and performatively instituted modes of temporality that are invoked within the terms of a normative framework which asserts that subversion, destabilization, or displacement requires a sexuality that somehow escapes the hegemonic prohibitions on sex" (*GT*, 38-39). The temporal production of an atemporal subject achieves, in this way, a final security for the hegemonic structure of the law itself. The Lacanian religious idealization of failure becomes a religious idealization of an atemporal being that stands before an eternal law.

In *Gender Trouble* the theological nature of this argument is made only by implication, through a rhetorical paralleling of the Lacanian religious idealization, and through the placing of this argument within a broader articulation of a theological critique. In *Excitable Speech* the theological nature of performativity in the production of an atemporal subject is noted explicitly. Butler is here making a move to Derridean citationality for thinking the efficacy of power in its performative movements. For Butler, Derrida's reading of performativity establishes the citational nature of every speech act, including performative speech acts.<sup>71</sup> The critical space that is opened by Derrida through his rereading of performativity as a citational act becomes a site from within which Butler is able to further elaborate a theological critique.

Within this space Butler adopts, and greatly expands on, citationality as a means for contesting the "sovereign conceit" that appears, as she argues, in critical discussions of hate speech, and, in a more general sense, in the figure of the subject of performative speech (*ES*, 16).

The sovereign conceit of the performative speech act is itself a threefold designation of the

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<sup>71</sup> This is to begin to enter into the long history of the conceptual determination of performativity. For present purposes, Derrida develops his understanding of performativity as a citational practice in the essays collected in English in the work *Limited Inc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988). These essays work within and against both J.L. Austin's seminal *How To Do Things With Words*, Second Edition, ed. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001) and John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994). For an introduction to this history, see Jonathon Culler, "Philosophy and Literature: The Fortunes of the Performative," *Poetics Today* 21, no.3 (Fall 2000): 503-519.

performative subject, both as the subject who is enacting a performative speech act and as the subject performed within the performative act of speech. First, Butler means to designate as the sovereign conceit the determination of the speaking subject as fully efficacious in her speaking. Against this sovereign conceit Butler quite simply observes that “Not all utterances that have the form of the performative... actually work” (*ES*, 16). Butler has already, as we have seen in her critique of Lacan and the implication of the Lacanian law, announced the historical as a first principle of failure for that which may appear as necessary or demanding of a necessary implementation. In *Excitable Speech* and as an elaboration of Derridean citationality, Butler develops two further principles of failure, now registered as the failure of the performative.<sup>72</sup> As with her reading of the infelicity of the Lacanian Law, the failure of the citational performative arises from its necessary relation to history. But here, the historical relation of the speech act is a designation of the historical and futural context of the speech act itself. As a citation the speech act is both a reiteration of what has come before, a citation of a prior authority from which it draws its own author, and is an act that continues to act beyond the immediacy of its enunciation, producing effects that are not and cannot be anticipated. The speech act is, in this sense, not a pure act, but “a certain nexus of temporal horizons, the condensation of an iterability that exceeds the moment it occasions” (*ES*, 14). A nexus that, in its own twist, Butler designates as a “ritual” (*ES*, 25). Arising out of a time that is not its own, moving into a continuation of acts that cannot be foreseen in their totality, the ritualized performative act is an act of dislocation: dislocating the subject within a time that it does not and cannot control.<sup>73</sup> And it is precisely this

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<sup>72</sup> Salih, *Judith Butler*, 91.

<sup>73</sup> Although Amy Hollywood provides a thoughtful and important analysis of ritual, and ritualization, within Butler’s understanding of performativity, she fails to acknowledge the irony in Butler’s deployment of ritual in order to complicate any religious completion that may be produced in or as ritual practice. This is, in other words, to fail to understand Butler’s turn to the language of ritual within and as a part of her theological critique. Amy Hollywood, “Performativity, Citationality, Ritualization,” *History of Religions* 42, no.2 (Nov. 2002): 93-115.



ritual practice that undoes its theological subject. To figure the subject as fully efficacious in its performative speech acts, as being fully in control of what it is and does, is, Butler announces, “a clearly theological construction” of the subject (*ES*, 50), one which must elide its own ritual performative production. This theological determination of the subject is to determine the subject as a pure causal origin, enacting from out of itself its own speech, will, and effect, as completely determined. This is a “divinely empowered subject” of complete control (*ES*, 50).

Secondly, then, Butler argues, the production of this divinely empowered subject, with all the privileges of the sovereign conceit, standing at the origin of its efficacious act, is produced through the metaleptic covering of the history of its own arising (*ES*, 49).<sup>74</sup> This metalepsis, the production of this “subject-effect,” is an affect of citation itself. As such, the displacement of the historical iterations through which the subject cites its own being by a divinely inspired originary subject occurs through a congealing of the very history which is overcome. Citation is a stoppage of the historical movement of any becoming in and as a singular being, existing alone in its isolation. And it is on the basis of this congealing of history that the originary subject becomes a subject to-be prosecuted. As Butler argues:

If the function of the subject as fictive origin is to occlude the genealogy by which that subject is formed, the subject is also installed in order to assume the burden of responsibility for the very history that subject dissimulates; the juridicalization of history, then, is achieved precisely through the search for subjects to prosecute who might be held accountable and, hence, temporarily resolve the problem of a fundamentally unprosecutable history (*ES*, 50).

What was, in *Gender Trouble*, a covering over through a performative twist of the temporal production of the subject, is now argued to be a theological determination of a temporality by

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<sup>74</sup> One should also note the way in which this understanding of the performative as a theological gesture structures the classical Christian doctrine of the *creatio ex nihilo*: although Genesis 1 cites, in the ambiguity of its own figurations, a series of creation narratives from neighboring cultures a presents a co-operative divine creation, in the Christian theological tradition this doubled historicity is elided in the hermeneutics of the text and in the doctrine of God’s omnipotence so that Genesis 1 becomes a story of absolute origin without precedent.

which a subject can become subject before the law. It is not simply a juridical logic of guilt that will produce a subject before the law, but a theological logic that will install a singular doer behind every deed, overcoming the deeds of its own becoming through the assertion of its own individual being. The sovereign conceit produces, then, a subject that, overcoming the weight of its own history, is both divine origin of its act, but also then full origin of its sin.

In a final determination of the sovereign conceit of a theologically determined subject, Butler reiterates that the power of performativity is itself a derivative power: “If a performative provisionally succeeds ..., then it is not because an intention successfully governs the action of speech, but only because that action echoes prior actions, and *accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior and authoritative set of practices*” (*ES*, 51; emphasis in original). As we have seen, the power of the performative is, for Butler, a power of citational iteration, as both a citing of previous authority, and as an accumulation of history in the event of the performative citation. As we will see, this accumulation is not only an accumulation of power, but an accumulating of matter, where matter itself becomes through a becoming temporality of citational iteration.<sup>75</sup> This history that is cited is not simply a singular history, but is a historical community, or a community of history. Continuing within arguments articulated by J.L. Austin and Pierre Bourdieu, the propriety of any singular performative, and so the possibility of its efficacy, rests on a proper citing of a prior authority, a proper citing that occurs within a properly determined context.<sup>76</sup> As a communal in-citing, the performative not only draws on the historical weight of its citations, but the performative arises within a context, a context of authority and meaning (*ES*, 155). The power of any citational performance, either to

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<sup>75</sup> In her own citational space, Butler makes this argument in a series of footnotes to the Introduction and first chapter of *Bodies That Matter*. See notes 7 and 8 of the Introduction, and 3, 5, 12 and 28.

<sup>76</sup> See Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, and Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 1991.

enact a moment of violent hate, or to call into being that which it names, is therefore derived from and within the context of its arising.<sup>77</sup> As the repeated history of proper authority, the properly authorized performative act is itself a ritualized performance of that history (*ES*, 51). In a glance back to Hegel, it is possible to argue that the citational performative is only effective, if it is effective, in bringing about that which it names because it arises within a community, a history of citational practice.

Although it will become necessary to follow Butler's argument further here, to the point where the performative fails to maintain in its own propriety within its citational history and context, when, in other words, the citational performance begins to cite otherwise than it ought, to complete our own articulation of Butler's theological critique it is necessary to note that the sovereign conceit functions to elide this entire historical context. The theological production of a sovereign subject is precisely the production of a subject who exists outside of all history and all context, being the singular origin of its deed, and enacting from afar a will through its own fully efficacious speech (*ES*, 50-51).<sup>78</sup> This theological determination of the subject is then a restriction on the field of analysis itself (*ES*, 50). Power cannot be followed through the movements of the historical or the social, as it resides simply in the subject, as its point of being and site of enactment. With the sovereign conceit fully granted to the subject, Butler argues, political critique is not possible (*ES*, 50).

This is, then, to return to Butler's elaboration of a theological critique in *Gender Trouble*. Here, within a reading of Lacan and post-Lacanian, Butler reinvokes Foucault to offer a doubled critique: first, to question the temporality within which the subject is produced and is said to exist, and second, to question the effective field of the Law's power. In regard to the latter,

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<sup>77</sup> Terry Lovell, "Resisting with Authority: Historical Specificity, Agency and the Performative Self," *Theory, Culture and Society* 20, no. 1 (February 1, 2003): 3.

<sup>78</sup> Kotsko, "The Failed Divine Performative," 214.

Butler offers, through Foucault, a displacement of the law by power. Power becomes the thematic of critical intervention precisely because it moves through the historical, contextual becoming of the subject itself (*GT*, 39). Within a determination of the subject as arising within and as a relation to the law, the law becomes the singular instance of being itself. Analysis, and in *Gender Trouble* this is the analysis of the sexed and gendered subject, is then limited to the singularity of the law. It is, then, only within the sovereign conceit of the subject that the subject is determined as arising within the singular space of the law, and it is as a theological critique that power comes to be the structuring movement of subject production, a movement that has no bounds. If, on the one hand, this will make it possible for Butler, in *Giving An Account of Oneself*,<sup>79</sup> to explore the possibilities of a becoming subjection that is not limited to the becoming guilty of a Nietzschean determination of the subject, it is also, by way of a theological critique, the grounds for a politics of subversive possibility.

Within the early works that we have been exploring here, especially *Subjects of Desire*, *Gender Trouble*, and *Excitable Speech*, a doubled movement is seen: first, the movement from metaphysics to an analytics of power, and second, the movement from a theological critique to an analytics of power. In both, the move to an analytics of power is rendered as a determination of power as political, as moving through the historical, the temporal, the social. In this other onto-theological critique that Butler proposes, the opening of metaphysics to its own historical becoming is paralleled by an opening made into the production of the subject by a theological critique. The trajectory of these texts, then, in this interplay between metaphysics, theology, and power, is not a question of a theological determination of the figure of being or Being, but rather of the determination of the logic of power, of productivity. The unbinding of metaphysics, as

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<sup>79</sup> In *Giving An Account of Oneself* Butler proposes a self-criticism, acknowledging a too-ready acceptance of the Nietzschean account of subject formation as a response to a guilt required prosecution (15).

the opening of metaphysics to the history of its own becoming, an opening made possible by a theological critique, is then the beginning of the political.

## CHAPTER 2

### UNBOUND METAPHYSICS AND THE POLITICAL

What becomes of metaphysics after it has been undone by the political? We might, as one possibility, wish to be done with metaphysics in order to fulfill a politics of possibility to come. Our desire would be for a post-metaphysical, and usually a post-religious, culture within which this politics could flourish. This is, as one example, the proposal offered by Richard Rorty, especially in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*.<sup>1</sup> Here, Rorty begins by determining the political and social aim of both metaphysics and theology as the articulation and production of a common essence through which humanity may be united in its rights to existence. When confronted with the contingency of our historical being, which seems to make such an essence impossible, both metaphysics and theology posit a deeper reality through which humanity's true essence can be found. Rather than providing a grounding for our social and political being, this move to a deeper reality is, Rorty argues, a flight from reality, an escape from the reality of time and chance. We must be freed, Rorty continues, from this desire for escape, the desire of metaphysics and theology, in order for a politics of our historical being, of our freedom, to be practiced.

As we have seen, Butler's proposal is not yet to be done with metaphysics in quite such a simple manner. Metaphysics, as the discourse of our historical condition of being, as the thought of the context of our becoming and our making meaning, is not so easily done away with. Rather than espousing an escape from metaphysics, Butler's project proposes to undo any final completion of metaphysics, or any metaphysical identity, so as to open metaphysics and identity to their own future becoming.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

So again, then, what is to become of metaphysics when it has been undone? In short, it becomes. Or rather, it becomes a metaphysics of becoming. Although Judith Butler's project will be amenable to a metaphysics of becoming,<sup>2</sup> she has continued to avoid following through with a systematic ordering of the metaphysical desire that her own project begins with or, for that matter, any metaphysical desire. But can we continue with her and avoid this desire for the metaphysical, a desire that will continue to push thought beyond itself to a feeling of the becoming of all actuality?<sup>3</sup> When it has been undone by the political, when it has been opened to its own conditions of becoming, metaphysics becomes not as a desire for the final capture of being, but as the desire for a radical empiricism, for a feeling of actuality in all its becoming diversity and diversification. The necessity of metaphysics becomes, in other words, the necessity of being accountable to the universality of experience, of all that "we are conscious, as enjoyed, perceived, willed, or thought" (*PR*, 3). And this is, as the present chapter will argue, a necessity that we must now follow.

To follow this necessity we must turn from the political to the metaphysical. And in this, I want to turn from the political thought and practice of Butler to the metaphysical and

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<sup>2</sup> This connection was first announced by Christina K. Hutchins in "Unconforming Becomings: The Significance of Whitehead's Novelty and Butler's Subversion for the Repetitions of Lesbian Identity and the Expansion of the Future," in *Process and Difference: Between Cosmological and Poststructuralist Postmodernisms*, eds. Catherine Keller and Anne Daniell, SUNY Series in Constructive Postmodern Thought, ed. David Ray Griffin (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002), 111-146. Recently, the connection Hutchins created has begun to bear fruit. First, in December, 2009, the Whitehead Research Project hosted a conference, "Becomings, Misplacements, Departures: Butler and Whitehead as Catalysts for Contemporary Thought," exploring the connections and intersections between the work of Butler and Whitehead, second, in 2011, *Secrets of Becoming: Negotiating Whitehead, Deleuze, and Butler*, eds. Roland Faber and Andrea M. Stephenson (New York: Fordham University Press) was released, and finally, there is the soon to be released collection *On the Occasion: Butler on Whitehead*, eds. Roland Faber and Deena Lin, Value Inquiry Book Series, Contemporary Whitehead Studies, eds. Roland Faber and Brian G. Henning (New York: Rodopi, forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup> In the opening section of *Process and Reality* Whitehead determines one of the conditions of the speculative project which gives rise to his metaphysics as that necessity which "bear[s] in itself its own warrant of universality throughout all experience." *Process and Reality*, Corrected Edition, eds. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 4. Further references to *Process and Reality* will appear in text, indicated by *PR* where necessary. As we will see below, this necessity will impel the speculative project back into experience as a radical empiricism.

speculative project of Alfred North Whitehead. This for the simple reason that Whitehead's metaphysics, as a metaphysics of becoming, is itself already infected by the political. Although it is often quite easy to forget, *Process and Reality*, Whitehead's metaphysical *magnum opus*, is the middle text of a trilogy that has as its end civilization.<sup>4</sup> Although *Adventures of Ideas* literally ends with civilization, *Science and the Modern World* and *Process and Reality* are also, to varying degrees, also concerned with an articulation of the conditions of a civilization of experience.<sup>5</sup> The aim of Whitehead's speculative project is to articulate the conditions of civilization, and so his metaphysics becomes the speculative discourse of an ever new immanent politics to come.<sup>6</sup>

Given that Whitehead's thought is often reduced to the metaphysical as a way to overcome, or at least sidestep the Kantian critiques of metaphysics, a movement that downplays or disregards the political infection of his thought, the present unfolding of Whitehead's speculative project begins with a return to Kant as an attempt to articulate another origination for Whitehead's own thought, one in which the metaphysical is the systematic discourse of the political. In attempting to follow Whitehead's own historical method, this return will not be simple or straight. In figuring his own place within the philosophical tradition, Whitehead provides for us a determination of philosophy as both a historical and a creative practice. This practice is instigated by and in relation to the shock that the "great philosopher" produces: "A new idea," Whitehead argues in the opening of *Process and Reality*, "introduces a new alternative and we are not less indebted to a thinker when we adopt the alternative which he

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<sup>4</sup> The final section of *Adventures of Ideas* articulates the conditions of civilization: art, beauty, truth, adventure and peace. *Adventures of Ideas, Adventures of Ideas*. (New York: The Free Press, 1967). Further references to *Adventures of Ideas* will appear in text, indicated by *AI* where necessary.

<sup>5</sup> A.H. Johnson, *Whitehead's Philosophy of Civilization* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1962), x.

<sup>6</sup> Keith Robinson, "The Lure of Multiple Contrast," *Theory & Event* 8.2 (2005) *Project MUSE*. Web. 28 Mar. 2011. <<http://muse.jhu.edu/>>.



discarded. Philosophy never reverts to its old position after the shock of a great philosopher” (*PR*, 11). Whether by acceptance of what is offered or the taking up of what has been rejected, although more often in ways less clearly defined between these two, philosophy is always caught up within a thought that is given to it.<sup>7</sup> Following this, Whitehead’s practice is to always announce his own philosophy as being already found in those philosophers which have come before – in that long series of footnotes to Plato – a practice that has given rise to a mixed review of his own historical acumen. With his interest in not only what has been accepted but in what has been rejected, his interest in the other of philosophical conceptualization, Whitehead becomes, it seems, a most serious mis-reader of the philosophical tradition. This is the fate of anyone interested in what has been made possible, and not simply in what has been made.

Even with this historical orientation, Whitehead’s philosophical practice is, at the same time, an attempt to avoid reducing the practice of philosophy to the practice of historical philosophy.<sup>8</sup> Whitehead does not simply practice historical philosophy when he speculates his own metaphysic. Rather his practice is the insistence that the history of philosophy is the condition for the practice of philosophy. For Whitehead, philosophy is a practice that acknowledges that no philosopher is producing *ex nihilo* a radically new philosophy. Rather the philosopher is a conceptual designer as re-designer,<sup>9</sup> tinkering with what has been given, and so

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<sup>7</sup> Wisdom is, Whitehead argues in *Adventures of Ideas*, the practice of thought that is always caught up in this interplay: “To understand,” he argues, “is always to exclude a background of intellectual incoherence. But Wisdom is persistent pursuit of the deeper understanding, ever confronting intellectual system with the importance of its omissions.” (*AI*, 47).

<sup>8</sup> This is, as Keith Robinson argues, to practice the history of philosophy as “imaginative coordination” and “experimentation.” See Keith Robinson, “Whitehead, Post-Structuralism, and Realism,” in *Secrets of Becoming: Negotiating Whitehead, Deleuze, and Butler*, eds. Roland Faber and Andrea M. Stephenson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 60.

<sup>9</sup> As Whitehead argues in *Process and Reality*, “Every science must devise its own instruments. The tool required for philosophy is language. Thus philosophy redesigns language in the same way that, in physical science, pre-existing appliances are redesigned” (*PR*, 11).

allowing creativity into a world of continual production that has already been producing.<sup>10</sup> For Whitehead philosophy is itself a practice of a creation of concepts, a creativity that is itself in the name of Creativity.<sup>11</sup>

This also means, Whitehead continues, that philosophy never simply reverts to an earlier position of thought. History will always intervene in the unfolding of philosophy, affecting how thought unfolds within and as the experience of what has been given. Any retrieval of a thought, whether as a singular concept or a systematic apparatus, will always be a retrieval that takes place through and as what has been given. And it is precisely this historical movement of thought that is condensed in the moment of the great philosopher. The shock of a great philosopher is never produced simply by or out of the singularity of the individual; rather, philosophy is always unfolding within the wake of thought that the great philosopher also thinks within. The great philosopher becomes a relay, a vector as Whitehead might say, among many philosophers, transforming a history of thought from what has been given into what might be. The shock of the great philosopher, then, is a shock-wave produced as the condensation of a history of thought producing a transformation, a redirection, the slightest or greatest of alterations, within the ever moving history of thought. The practice of philosophy is, then, the deployment of a conceptual energy that is itself derived from that which precedes it, into a

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<sup>10</sup> This insight, although elaborated here, is already founded on an ontological and metaphysical decision to privilege creativity as ultimate, in place of any static conception of vacuous being. This is also already, as Catherine Keller has argued in *Face of the Deep*, a theological decision, or rather, as will be seen, a theological critique. *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming*, New York: Routledge, 2003, 157-171.

<sup>11</sup> In its most obvious appearance, this is the subtitle through which Stengers designates here formal reading of Whitehead in *Penser avec Whitehead: Une libre et sauvage creation de concepts*. Following Deleuze and Guattari, Stengers will propose a constructivist reading of Whitehead, one which is determined as a creative practice of conceptual construction. The present reading of Whitehead is largely influenced by Stengers' on this point. *Penser avec Whitehead: Une libre et sauvage creation de concepts* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002).

history of thought in ways that can never be strictly originated, ended or fully determined, but which, more radically, if also more subtly, can only be taken up, relayed, redirected.<sup>12</sup>

To follow the redirection of philosophy that Whitehead proposes, then, we return to Kant, to begin to read Whitehead again.<sup>13</sup> To recover the unthought in Kant, that which Kant himself and his followers have left behind, this return follows Michel Foucault who opens up a political possibility within Kant's own transcendental project. Within this opening, and against what Whitehead himself will, at times, argue (*PR*, xi), Whitehead's speculative project can be seen as a post-Kantian project, beginning at the closure of what we have designated as a metaphysics of conversion.

This is to situate Whitehead's project in the condition of its own becoming with Kant, and specifically with Kant as the final moment of a metaphysics of conversion, that is opened up to and as a political possibility. As Whitehead will continually argue, every completion is itself the condition for a new beginning, and so, if read against himself, Kant becomes not only the completion of the metaphysics of conversion, but the beginning of a metaphysics of possibility. It is Michel Foucault who, more than any other thinker, has worked to open Kant to this new possibility, to a new possibility. Once Kant is opened up to his own beginning again, it becomes possible to articulate Whitehead's speculative project as a speculation of possibility. With this, it is possible to argue that Whitehead's speculative project is a post-Kantian, constructivist and experimental metaphysics of possibility. Though it is often easy to forget, for Whitehead this speculation of possibility arises under the strict demands of secularization. Through this

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<sup>12</sup> In the final passage of her *Penser avec Whitehead*, Stengers determines the Whiteheadian practice of philosophy with the aid of Deleuze and Guattari, arguing that, for Whitehead, the philosopher is able to produce a thought only because he has become a "piece or part of the machinery of that which has captured him" and not because he is the creator of that system. ("Un devenir 'machinique' au sens de Deleuze et Guattari, au sens où le penseur ne peut produire cette pensée que parce qu'il est lui-même devenu pièce ou rouage de ce qui l'a capturé bien plutôt ne l'a créé" (572). See also Isabella Palin, "On Whitehead's Recurrent Themes and Consistent Style," *Process Studies* 37, no.2 (Fall/Winter 2008): 79.

<sup>13</sup> Robinson, "Whitehead, Post-Structuralism, and Realism," 66.

secularization of God and experience, the speculative project becomes, in its final moment, and in its completion, a philosophy of civilization. So our exploration concludes with an articulation of this Whiteheadian civilization, a civilization of adventure and peace, articulated as a political possibility in the final section of *Adventures of Ideas*, and as a theo-political possibility in the final section of *Process and Reality*. As the end of his speculative project, a civilization of adventure and peace becomes a civilization without end.

### 1. The end of conversion and the beginning of critique

In the final section of *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault determines the Kantian shock within which philosophy now works as the production of man.<sup>14</sup> As we have seen in the Introduction, in Kant the full determination of being comes to speak through man and speaks man into being within and as a logic of becoming that is a conversion to being. This conversion is a productive logic within which historical and material difference is captured and overcome by being transformed into singular simplicity, into simple objects and subjects. This Kantian shock is not itself, of course, an absolutely new determination of the subject. It is, rather, the final moment of a metaphysics of conversion through which Being is determined as and through a subject of conversion, a subject announced by Augustine as God. This determination of Being is a demand of and by the simple unity of God now transposed into the transcendental subject that becomes the measure and mark of simple being. The history of conversion is a history of the religious subject becoming as a desire to simplicity in the presence of God as it becomes a subject becoming its own demand for *a priori* simplicity. And it is this transcendental subject, arising within a desire of simplicity and so within a demand of simplicity from itself and for itself, that is, Foucault argues, man.

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<sup>14</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 312. Further references to *The Order of Things* will appear in text, indicated by *OT* where necessary.

Foucault is, of course, a difficult authority to cite in order to understand the history that has been traced from Augustine to Kant as a metaphysics of conversion. As the most fundamental difficulty, in *The Order of Things* Foucault insists that the appearance of man only arrives after a threshold has been crossed, after a definitive break has been made with Classical forms of thought and representation (*OT*, 304). Man only appears, Foucault argues, within the strictly delimited space of the modern episteme, an episteme that is marked by a determinate mode of representation. And this mode of representation only arises within a space prepared for by the representational practices of the modern episteme. The history of conversion seems to unfold within a metaphysical and ontological determination of being as a history without break. To the extent, therefore, that Foucault argues that the appearance of man occurs within and following from a fundamental break within representational practice, man would appear for Foucault within a different archeological trajectory than that which I have designated as the genealogical history of a metaphysics of conversion. It might appear, then, that Foucault arises not to confirm the production of man but to contest conversion as the metaphysical demand that has continued as a demand from Augustine to Kant.

There is, though, another history told in the final moments of *The Order of Things*. Here, in this other history, Foucault proposes that the movement that allows man to arise is a metaphysical inversion that is itself an inversion of Western thought (*OT*, 317). This is a history that moves from a time much earlier than the modern, or its genius Kant, and so cannot simply coincide with the Modern. This is also a history not simply of representational practice, but of metaphysical practice and so requires a reconsideration of the simple conditions of representational logic by which man appears. Inversions are, in this sense, never simple

ruptures, never simple breaks, and metaphysical inversions must be more than inversions of representational practice.

For Foucault the metaphysical inversion, fully enacted in Kant, is an inversion of the finite and the infinite. With this inversion the finite returns only to itself, without passage through the infinite, either as from the infinite or to the infinite. If this is, as Foucault argues, a certain opening of the metaphysical tradition, this inversion is also the completion of that tradition.<sup>15</sup> It is, we might say, the completion of the metaphysics of conversion. The productive logic that in Augustine is determined as a necessary movement through the infinite God becomes in Kant a necessary passage through the finite limits of man, and it is this inversion of the movement of power that allows man to appear. In Kant the productive logic through and in which the subject arises circulates quite strictly in a now and forever closed circle: from the finite to the finite, from man to man, producing that out of which it arises.<sup>16</sup> Within the history that Foucault provides this metaphysical inversion produces man, as finite, taking the place of God, as infinite, precisely as both ground and measure of being (*OT*, 316).<sup>17</sup> And this metaphysical inversion is registered in both a negative and positive gesture: in its negative trajectory, Foucault argues, there appears the continual reduction of metaphysics to the human scale of finitude, while in its positive trajectory there is the appearance of man (*OT*, 317). Man becomes, then, the measure and source of being, the fundamental ground of all determinations of both finite and infinite being and the site through which the logic of production must always pass.

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<sup>15</sup> Amy Allen, *The Politics of Ourselves: Power, Autonomy and Gender in Contemporary Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 33.

<sup>16</sup> Beatrice Han, *Foucault's Critical Project: Between the Transcendental and the Historical*, trans. Edward Pile (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 3.

<sup>17</sup> See Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Second Ed. with afterword by and an interview with Michel Foucault (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 30.

In one sense, then, the history presented as the history of a metaphysics of conversion is a history not only of conversion but of inversion. Foucault's desire for the end of man, as the product of this inversion, is also, then, a desire for the end of conversion. But ends are always as complex as inversions. On the one hand, the history of the metaphysics of conversion has arisen as a history of production that is more complex than its simple being. As we have seen, the finite (man) does not simply replace the infinite (God) as the ground, source and determination of being, but there is also, in the production of man and world within the history of the metaphysics of conversion a continual redeployment of the powers and structures of the finite and the infinite in the determination of man and his world. These redeployments always produce a crossing and over-crossing of that which is attributable to the finite and that which is attributable to the infinite. If an inversion occurs within these deployments, it is an inversion of mutual implication and movement that can never simply be a displacement of God by man. Inversions, in other words, must always be untangled, and not simply overcome, and in this untangling we confront a new beginning.

In her recent reading of Foucault, especially concerning his relation to Kant, Amy Allen argues precisely this point: Foucault's call for the end of man as the final gesture of *The Order of Things* is not itself an end, but a taking up of the Kantian critical project. "What Foucault is calling for," Allen argues,

is a critique of critique, which means not only a criticism of Kant's project for the way in which it closes off the very opening for thought that it had created but also a critique *in the Kantian sense of the term* – that is, an interrogation of the limits and conditions of possibility of that which Kant himself took as his own starting point, namely, the transcendental subject.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Allen, *The Politics of Ourselves*, 35. (Emphasis in original).

Rather than simply marking an end, a death, a final gesture, the completion of the metaphysic of conversion that occurs in Kant is itself the occasion for a new beginning. In taking up both that which Kant has accepted and that which he has rejected a new possibility arises.

Following from this, it is possible to offer a determination of Foucault's project as a critical project, precisely in the Kantian sense. From beginning to end, Foucault attempts an exposure of the conditions of the subject. This is to immediately challenge a rather common, although also superficial, reading of Foucault, one which is most forcefully articulated by Jürgen Habermas in his "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present."<sup>19</sup> Habermas argues that two different Kant's appear in Foucault's various readings of and critiques of Kant.<sup>20</sup> First, there is the Kant of *The Order of Things*, Kant as the epitome of Enlightenment rationality, founder of man, and enemy of Foucault's positive project. Opposed to this Kant is the Kant who appears in Foucault's late essay "What is Enlightenment?" Here, according to Habermas, another Kant appears, a Kant who authors the origin of an "'ontology of contemporary reality' that leads through Hegel, Nietzsche, and Max Weber to Horkheimer and Adorno. Surprisingly, in the last sentence of his lecture Foucault includes himself in this tradition."<sup>21</sup> This new Kant, or late Foucaultian Kant, is incommensurate with the early Foucaultian Kant, Habermas argues, and so is a symptom of a greater incoherence within Foucault's larger project. For Habermas, and many of Foucault's readers, the final turn to Kant, and more generally the final (re)turn to the subject is also a final and incoherent turn.

In proposing to find a consistent reading of Kant in Foucault Allen is also proposing a consistent Foucault. The consistency or lack thereof is a minor concern of the present project.

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<sup>19</sup> Jürgen Habermas, "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present," in *Critique and Power; Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, ed. with introduction, Michael Kelley (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 149-156.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.



In general, I find it important, for reasons that will become apparent, to heed Foucault's own admonition that we leave the desire for authorial consistency to the police and theologians. For now, though, it is possible to follow Allen into this construction of a coherent Foucault. The continuity that Allen proposes hinges on determining Foucault's project as, at least in part, an immanent critique of Kant.<sup>22</sup> On the one hand, this means, as Allen emphasizes, that Foucault's project is always concerned with the final of Kant's three grand questions: what is man? For Foucault, of course, this concern will morph into a question not only of man, but of the subject itself.<sup>23</sup> But more directly, and certainly more directly for my interest, this question becomes for Foucault a question of the production of man, the production of the subject.<sup>24</sup> In taking up Kant's critical project Foucault transforms the search for the transcendental conditions of experience into a search for the historical conditions of the production of the subject. With this turn to the production of the subject, Kant's critical project becomes in Foucault a limit practice, a becoming limit in order to know the limits of what can be. Again, Foucault offers us a new beginning: at the end of conversion, with the production of man, the metaphysics of conversion is opened to a new possibility: a productive possibility as the possibility of production itself. The investigation of limits that guided the desire for simplicity which animated Kant's work to the production of transcendental subject is now opened to a production of the subject at the limit of its being.

The articulation of critique as a limit practice will follow; for now it is also necessary to note that for Foucault, this opening of Kant, the taking up of the critical philosophy as a limit practice, is also the implosion of the Cartesian space within which the philosophical subject as a

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<sup>22</sup> Allen, *The Politics of Ourselves*, 24.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Alan D. Schiff, "Foucault's reconfiguration of the subject: From Nietzsche to Butler, Laclau/Mouffe, and beyond," *Philosophy Today* 41, no.1 (Spring 1997): 154.

subject of doubt is produced. Specifically, the Kantian subject, Foucault argues, is fundamentally the author of his own escape, the subject who produces “release from his self-incurred tutelage.”<sup>25</sup> Although this self-produced release is quite central to Foucault’s reading of Kant, it is immediately a complicated release. For the Enlightenment subject is caught in a political bind, the bind that Foucault designates as a “rational despotism.”<sup>26</sup> According to Foucault, the subject of the Enlightenment that Kant proposes is free to reason, to employ his autonomous reason, free to produce his own release from tutelage, on the one condition that he commit to a political obedience. This political obedience, Foucault continues, is already established in the critiques through and as the limits of reason.<sup>27</sup>

With this, it would be possible to argue that Kant’s political thought arises precisely within Descartes’ “Second Meditation.” Foucault’s reading of Kant’s political Enlightenment arises, then, precisely as his own meditation on the political consequences of allowing a philosophical meditation to continue only as and within the politically protected space of a doubt that is not madness.<sup>28</sup> Just as the Cartesian subject is only allowed to continue his meditations within a space secured by a juridical confinement of madness and a horizon of God’s infinite presence, the Kantian subject is free to reason within the limits of reason, a limit that is secured by those who are, as Kant argues, not afraid of shadows and who have the power of force backing them.<sup>29</sup> As Kant goads King Frederick, this freedom of reason can be allowed by one with a well-disciplined army, and by an enlightened ruler who can announce to his subjects

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<sup>25</sup> Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?” in *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals and What is Enlightenment?* Second Ed., Rev., trans. Lewis White Beck (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1997), 83.

<sup>26</sup> Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” 308. Already challenging any clear break between Foucault’s late and early readings of Kant, this designation of man existing within the bind of a “rational despotism” is itself consistent with the announcement, in *The Order of Things*, that man is an “enslaved sovereign” (*OT*, 312).

<sup>27</sup> Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” 308.

<sup>28</sup> Foucault addresses this question directly in “My Body, This Paper, This Fire,” in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, vol. 2 of *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (New York: The New Press, 1998), 393-417.

<sup>29</sup> Kant, “What is Enlightenment?” 89.

“argue as much as you will, and about what you will, only obey!”<sup>30</sup> In this militarily backed announcement of freedom, Foucault finds articulated a mutual determination of the political and philosophical moments of modernity: the decision to subject oneself to a given rational rule of law is replicated by and grounded in the decision to subject oneself to an *a priori* transcendental ground of knowledge and being.<sup>31</sup> The freedom to reason is itself announced within and as the space created by a political force. This bind, and the willingness to remain caught within it, Foucault makes clear, is not a “blind and foolish” obedience, but is rather an adaptation to circumstance, such that the use of reason is “subjected to the particular ends in view.”<sup>32</sup> Reason is, in other words, never truly free, but always free within bounds, within limits. The ends of knowledge, the ends of morality, the ends of politics: all are achieved within and as a subjection to an order that is always already given, backed by a force of violence.

Foucault’s immanent critique of Kant arises within this space of rational despotism, becoming a doubled implosion of the limits of critique: the limits of being determined by Kant as the limits of reason and the limits within which the subject itself arises. As such, the immanent critique occurs precisely as a political practice, a practice for and of transforming Kant’s own concern with limits and the proper determination of limits into a limit practice which is the creative transgression of the limits of what has been given. The immanent critique, in other words, becomes that which has been excluded from philosophy from the beginning: practice. And in taking up the critical project as a practice, Foucault positions critique precisely within that which has always been excluded from the metaphysics of conversion: history. Foucault’s limit practice becomes an historical practice, a practice of history and materialism. History and

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>31</sup> Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” 308.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 307.

matter come to implode the limits of that which has been determined to being within and as conversion.

Yet at the exact moment that Foucault proposes this implosion of the limit of being by history and matter, he also insists on the imposition of his own limit: “this criticism is not transcendental, and its goal is not that of making a metaphysics possible: it is genealogical in its design and archeological in its method.”<sup>33</sup> At that moment when Kant’s own limits are imploded, when Descartes’ limits are imploded, when Augustine’s limits are imploded – when the history of conversion is opened to its own practice – Foucault insists on his own foreclosure, the foreclosure on metaphysics. The “historical ontology of ourselves” that Foucault draws out of Kant is always an exploration of the “practical systems” that determine the human subject: systems of relations of control over things, relations of actions upon others, relations with oneself.<sup>34</sup> As the analyses of these practical and relational systems, Foucault’s primary concern will also always be with the human subject; when Foucault analyzes the body, he analyzes the human body; when Foucault analyzes institutions, he analyzes human institutions. The tracings of power are always, in other words, tracings of that which flow through the human subject.

With this, the Foucaultian opening of Kant does not lead to metaphysics. It is rather “a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying.”<sup>35</sup> In determining critique as an experimental practice that is also a limit practice Foucault proposes a practice that is opposed at every point to metaphysics precisely because its concern is the historical production of the subject. Even as Foucault recognizes a certain metaphysical opening in Kant, an opening which is then closed down, Foucault will continue to close down this metaphysical opening in order to

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 315.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 318.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 315.

fully open the historical. For Foucault, these two – the metaphysical and the historical – are opposed at every turn so that critique, when it becomes an historical practice, is, it seems, a groundless practice, a groundlessness that evacuates the possibility of metaphysics. Drawing on his earlier reading of Nietzsche, it is possible to argue that for Foucault the practice of critique avoids the metaphysical promise of a fully grounded return home, a return to an origin, in order to avoid the imposition of an absolute limit that will bring an end to both the need for and possibility of experimentation.<sup>36</sup> There is no home, in other words, from which to survey the territory of philosophies possession.<sup>37</sup>

It will take the remainder of the present chapter to sort through the stakes of this foreclosure. For now, we can begin by noting that in order to develop a politics of possibility within a metaphysics it is necessary to turn away from both Foucault and Butler, finding recourse in the metaphysical speculations of the last great metaphysician of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Alfred North Whitehead.

In what follows, then, an opening will be made into the possibility of the politics to come through the opening that Foucault makes into Kant, an opening that Whitehead can then be opened up into. In this, Foucault will become the pivot upon which politics itself is opened back up into the metaphysical. What began as the political undoing of metaphysics becomes, in Whitehead, a metaphysical creativity of the political. And it is this movement back out into the metaphysical that is begun by Foucault's theological critique.

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<sup>36</sup> Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, vol. 2 of *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (New York: The New Press, 1998), 386-387.

<sup>37</sup> As Isabella Palin argues, Whitehead will in a similar way embark on an adventure of thought that must leave home, yet he will do so within and as a speculative practice of metaphysics. "On Whitehead's Recurrent Themes and Consistent Style," 80.

## 2. A theological opening

In the series of inversions and redeployments that have marked the history of the metaphysics of conversion, man has taken on one striking God-like determination: man becomes unknown to himself within this movement of productivity. In this Kantian movement a reflectivity of self-knowledge seems impossible for a self-determining being.<sup>38</sup> This is not simply a philosophical question, though, as this epistemic limit is itself, within this history of conversion, a replication of God's aseity as that is determined in Augustine's own opening confessional lament. The demand and productive power of conversion, it seems, must always arrive from a place of unknowing that cannot be challenged. Whether this foreclosure on knowledge, and as Judith Butler has so successfully argued, resistance,<sup>39</sup> is justified by God or the *a priori* seems to make little difference in force of practice.

It is precisely man as unknown to himself who occupies the ambiguous Kantian position designated by Foucault as both object and subject of knowledge (*OT*, 312), a position that also requires that man always disappears within his own knowledge and being. The death of man is already announced in his appearance, and so the gap of his absence is already his only possible presence.<sup>40</sup> To the extent that the Kantian shock is registered as the appearance of man, it is also registered as the appearance of man as always absent, as always withdrawing from the scene and source of his own production.<sup>41</sup> In this sense, the Kantian man is, as has been seen, a

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<sup>38</sup> As Judith Butler has argued throughout her career, even in Hegel, while also being against his own conclusions, complete self-knowledge and self-presence is an impossibility. See especially *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

<sup>39</sup> See especially Butler's critique of the theological determination of the Lacanian analysis of the law throughout her thought.

<sup>40</sup> Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" In *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, vol. 2 of *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (New York: The New Press, 1998), 209.

<sup>41</sup> As Jeffery Nealon argues, this determination of the subject as absent, as a lack eventuates in a political failure in the face of the other and in the presence of difference; the other becomes the self, difference becomes the same. As Nealon also argues, though, if Foucault most clearly notes this difficulty in Kant, he also, at times succumbs to his

radicalization of the Cartesian subject of doubt who has already begun the disappearance into his own doubt, a disappearance that is itself a radicalization of the Augustinian subject's ignorance of his own dispersed temporal existence that is escaped only by becoming frozen out of time. Each of these subjects is, in its own way, a product of the demands of conversion, so that conversion is a demand to that which can, finally, never be known.

With Foucault as a guide, it is possible to understand that to think in the wake of Kant is to think in the wake of a doubled theological determination of the subject: on the one hand, the Kantian subject is determined within a movement of power that always passes through simplicity as its origin and destination, a simplicity that has been inherited from a theological discourse of conversion; on the other hand, the Kantian subject is a subject always absent from its origin and destination, and so absent from any contestation of the movement within which it arises, a subject inscrutable and unknown in its own becoming. And so the theological is necessary, as Foucault implies, for the investigation of the gap of man's appearance and absence.<sup>42</sup> This is precisely, of course, the insight of Butler's theological critique which is itself a critique of these overlain and overlapping determinative productions of the subject as a singular and simple subject. Butler's theological critique is, in other words, a critique of the theological subject of conversion, even in its most secular appearances. As we have seen, the theological subject is, for Butler, a subject that is determined to be singular, simple and the source of power, while, at the same time, a subject that is, in its fundamental character, unknown to itself, cut off from a knowledge of its own becoming, blinded to its own grounding in power, and so ultimately a failure that will also be ineffectual in its confrontation with power. Butler's theological critique, then, attempts to lay bare the theological subject as having assumed the place of God, while

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own absence. See also Jefferey T. Nealon, *Alterity Politics: Ethics and Performative Subjectivity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

<sup>42</sup> Foucault, "What is an Author?" 209.

always noting the difficulties of this movement of assumption (*BM*, 5), to only and always be haunted by an absence that can never be challenged and that forecloses any resistance. It is precisely this theological subject that Butler attempts to undo from within: unbinding the subject from its own theological determinations in the name of a possible becoming otherwise, becoming a subject of a possible politics to come. The theological critique becomes, then, absolutely necessary for understanding the trajectory of conversion and for opening a politics of possibility within and as the undoing of the demand of conversion.

There is, of course, something somewhat troubling in so quickly moving to the theological after beginning with Foucault. But this is not the worst of it, for Foucault not only immediately demands a theological critique, but this theological critique is undertaken in order to open up a political critique, in the not-so-strictly Kantian sense that I have already begun to articulate. Foucault must become invested in and by a theological project precisely in order to continue the Kantian critical project. Or, to say this more strongly still, Foucault's theological critique is at the same time a Kantian critical practice. Although the theological critique seems to be demanded precisely as a critique of Kant, this critique itself is enacted in order to continue the critical project as a political project. The theological critique is that which allows Foucault's critical project to arise.

In order to understand Foucault's designation of Kantian critique as a limit practice in the late essays "What is Enlightenment?" and "What is Critique?" it is necessary to return not only to *The Order of Things*, but also to another of Foucault's earliest works, "The Preface to Transgression." In this reflection written at the same time as *The Order of Things*, we encounter a first announcement of the necessity of taking up a limit practice, here designated as the



experience of the death of God.<sup>43</sup> In this early work the experience of the death of God is the condition for a limit practice that opens the becoming subject to the limits of its own possibility. Across the temporal distance of these texts, from the beginning and end of his thought, it seems Foucault will enter into critique as a practice of the experience of the death of God as the critique of limits and the opening of possibility.

As we have already seen, Foucault begins his reading of Kant in the late texts by isolating a particular attitude, what he calls an Enlightenment attitude of critique.<sup>44</sup> This critical attitude is often exhausted as an epistemological practice, and so Foucault is quick to point out that in its critique, the Enlightenment has given us more than an epistemology: critique is, of course, a certain way of thinking, but it is also, Foucault argues, a way of “speaking and acting, a certain relationship to what exists, to what one knows, to what one does, a relationship to society, to culture and also a relationship to others.”<sup>45</sup> In “What is Enlightenment?” Foucault continues this determination of the critical attitude by arguing that it is “a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task.”<sup>46</sup> The critical attitude is at least, then, an epistemology, an ontology, and a politics: a way of knowing, a way of being, and a way of acting together.<sup>47</sup> Within the critical attitude, what we know and what we can be are, for Foucault, mutually implicated determinations, and so whatever critical attitude the Enlightenment provides will be an attitude

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<sup>43</sup> In his exploration of Foucault and religion, Mervyn Bendle opens the necessity of understanding the religious as related to the productive practice of the limit. Unfortunately, in doing so he fails to take Foucault’s constructivist arguments seriously enough, and so ends up positing an realm of the spiritual or the religious that pre-exists the practice of the limit. “Foucault, religion and governmentality,” *Australian Religion Studies Review* 15, no.1 (2002): 11-26.

<sup>44</sup> Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” 309.

<sup>45</sup> Michel Foucault, “What is Critique?” in *The Political*, ed. David Ingram, trans. Lysa Hochroth (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 191.

<sup>46</sup> Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” 309.

<sup>47</sup> Johanna Oksala, “Foucault’s politicization of ontology,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 43 (2010): 445-466.

that at once implicates one in epistemology, ontology and politics.<sup>48</sup> With this, the critical attitude that Foucault derives from Kant is a specific way of encountering the limits of what we can know and what we can be.

This is also a certain way of being in the present, in the moment of one's own historical being.<sup>49</sup> In its specificity, the Enlightenment attitude arises in relation to the limits established as and in a certain form of being governed. For Kant, the context of this governance is determined by the conditions of being governed that arose within 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe, conditions that are, as Kant acknowledges, religious.<sup>50</sup> Again, within these conditions, Foucault argues, the Kantian "release" is enacted in the desire to be governed otherwise, as the critical attitude enacts the desire of not being governed.<sup>51</sup> The specificity of the Kantian release is a release from a specific form of Christian governance, a release that is itself made possible by a particular concept of freedom. This release, then, is an encounter with forms of governance, an encounter that takes place through "acts of defiance, as challenge, as a way of limiting these arts of governing and sizing them up, transforming them, of finding a way to escape from them or, in any case, a way to displace them."<sup>52</sup> The Kantian release becomes, for Foucault, the production of an opening, an opening within which governance can be challenged, and other ways of being governed can be practiced, but an opening that will always remain fully embedded within the impurity of its historical moment of arising. It is, in other words, an opening of Kant to the historical specificity of his own critique, and so an opening of Kant to the historical. This historical critique becomes a practice, a permanent practice of living otherwise in a present that

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<sup>48</sup> Judith Butler, "What is Critique?" An Essay on Foucault's Virtue," in *The Political*, ed. David Ingram (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 220-221.

<sup>49</sup> Christina Hendricks, "Foucault's Kantian Critique: Philosophy and the Present," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 34, no.4 (2008): 357-382.

<sup>50</sup> Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" 89.

<sup>51</sup> Butler, "What is Critique?" 193.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

always arises within and as a particular historical moment. Within the historical moment announced by Kant the structure of reason and the structure of governance intersect at and as the limit of being. With surprising brevity, Foucault announces that critique “consists of analyzing and reflecting upon limits.”<sup>53</sup>

For Kant, it seems, the primary concern of limits, as both rational and practical, is to arrive at a determination of the limits that will secure certainty. For Foucault, this Kantian task of limiting becomes, in the present moment, the task “to transform the critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible crossing-over.”<sup>54</sup> Critique is no longer, in other words, the establishment of limits, but is the critical investigation of limits that can only occur as a transgressive passage through the limit. And it is this passage through that Foucault determines as a critique of critique: critique as a limit practice is an investigation into and of the limits within which the limits of knowing and being are determined.<sup>55</sup> This is both a critique of Kant’s own determination of limits, as well as “an interrogation of the limits and conditions of possibility of that which Kant himself took as his own starting point, namely, the transcendental subject itself.”<sup>56</sup> Just as critique, when determined as critique of arts of governance, is a critique of particular practices of governance, and not, we might say, a transcendental idealist critique of governance itself. Critique becomes, for Foucault, a historical practice of investigation, exposing and displacing forms of governance through exposing and displacing limits of possibility.

In “A Preface to Transgression” Foucault attempts to determine this limit practice within and as an exploration of the experience of the death of God. The death of God, though, is neither

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<sup>53</sup> Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” 315.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 315.

<sup>55</sup> Amy Allen, “Foucault and Enlightenment: A Critical Reappraisal,” *Constellations* 10, no.2 (2003); 189.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 189.

a simple nor singular matter, as Foucault reminds us.<sup>57</sup> In “Philosophy and the death of God” Foucault is quick to distinguish the death of God in Hegel, Feuerbach and Nietzsche. In Hegel, Foucault argues, the death of God is enacted by Reason taking the place of God; in Feuerbach, the death of God is enacted in the realization that God is an illusion that alienates man; in Nietzsche, Foucault’s seeming preferred determination of the death of God, the death of God “signifies the end of metaphysics, but God is not replaced by man, and the space remains empty.”<sup>58</sup> Confirming the earlier reading of *The Order of Things*, Foucault proposes not a simple replication and inversion of God and man, but an entry into this inversion, an entry that does not do away with the space created by God and man or the death of God and man, but is rather the filling of that space within and by the constitution of the historical conditions for the becoming subject, emptied of all *a priori* transcendental conditions. The absent space of the now-absented theological subject is filled with the historical and the material. This also means that the experience of the death of God is an experience that is always experienced, or is rather the condition of experience in the present moment. It is not, Foucault insists, a onetime event, the inauguration of the modern period or any period, for that matter. Rather, it is, as he says, the “now-constant space of our experience,” and that element in all experience.

In “A Preface to Transgression,” Foucault determines this continual experience of the death of God as experience without the limit of the Limitless or the boundary of exteriority.<sup>59</sup> Yet, precisely because of this, the experience of the death of God is itself impossible: it is an experience of impossible interiority. In a world without limit, without a principle of limitation, a

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<sup>57</sup> Michel Foucault, “Philosophy and the Death of God,” in *Religion and Culture*. Michel Foucault, ed. Jeremy R. Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), 85-86.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>59</sup> Michel Foucault, “A Preface to Transgression,” in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, vol. 2 of *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (New York: The New Press, 1998), 71.

principle that we will see Whitehead determine as a principle of concrescence, being itself is impossible. This impossibility arises not simply because of an absence of being (a rendering of being and possibility that would make a necessity of the contingently historical, and return Foucault precisely to the absent Kantian subject), but rather it arises within and from a play of limits. This playful anti-ontology is the eruption of transgression, rendered by Foucault as “the flash of lightning in the night,”<sup>60</sup> a flash that now comes not only to destroy all limit, but to re-ignite the limit of becoming in the rupture of this night of being. Transgression, for Foucault, is “an action that involves the limit, that narrow zone of a line where it displays the flash of its passage, but perhaps also its entire trajectory, even its origin; it is likely that transgression has its entire space in the line it crosses.”<sup>61</sup> This is not, then, the absolute absence of limit, but the opening of experience to exhaust itself in the play of limits, in the continual crossing and re-crossing of possibility. As an opening of experience to movement, transgression is a becoming of what might be when limits become sites of movement and not determinations of being.

Within the experience of the death of God the possibility of being does not depend, then, on the necessity of being within the limits of what has been, but on the necessity of the production of the possible through a contestation of the limits by which the (im)possible is determined. Necessarily conjoined, Foucault argues, “the limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess.”<sup>62</sup> The impossible experience of the death of God is the experience of the continual transgression of the limit of experience itself, a transgression that will, within the death of God, arise as an immanent determination of that very limit. With this, the marking of boundaries and the maintenance of boundaries, and so also the creation of being as that which is properly determined within bounds, is no longer the sole

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 73.

domain of God, but is now the consequence of transgression itself, a transgression made possible as the continual death of God. It is precisely, then, that a theological experience will open the space for critique.

To the extent that the impossibility of experience, the experience of the death of God, refers, for Foucault, to both that which is experienced and the (im)possibility of that experience, it opens up to the archeological investigation of possibility itself. In “Philosophy and the Death of God” it is precisely within the opening of the death of God that the philosopher can, Foucault argues, study “the space within which thought unfolds, as well as the conditions of that thought, its mode of constitution.”<sup>63</sup> What was, in “The Preface to Transgression” the site of an impossible experience has become, here, also the site from which and through which to investigate the possibility of experience and the mode of its constitution. This is precisely the determination of critique that Foucault will return to in “What is Enlightenment?” when he determines critique as a practical practice of crossing over. In this later text, critique is determined as a limit practice as a testing of the limits of what has been in order to attain to that which might be. If in this later text Foucault develops a limit attitude in relation to the Kantian practice of critique, in the early texts this limit practice is developed in relation to and as the experience of the death of God and the possibility of transgression that is opened within an experience of this death. The death of God, in other words, opens as a movement of transgression that forces a rupture within the limits of being itself, and it is this rupture of limits that constitutes the experience and practice of critique.

From within the experience of transgression made possible by and as the experience of the death of God an immanent critique of power is opened, a critique of that which has marked and been the mark of limit. The experience of the death of God becomes the experience of

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<sup>63</sup> Foucault, “Philosophy and the Death of God,” 86.

limits: limits become known in the experience of their absence, and so the experience of the death of God becomes the experience and practice of critique. It is precisely in the space opened by the death of the God that critique arises as a practice of transgression. The movement beyond Kant, the movement that will open Kant to the historical as a means to continue the practice of critique, is occasioned by, through, and as an experience of the death of God, an experience of the limit as its being passed over. In a double sense, then, critique is made possible through a theological critique. On the one hand, critique itself is made possible through and as a questioning of religious forms of governance, a questioning that itself historically arises as a theological series of resistances to the Church. On the other hand, critique is made possible by and as the experience of the death of God. In both of these cases, critique is a limit practice, a practice of enacting and transgressing the limits of what might be. To practice critique, then, is to enact an historical practice of encountering and transgressing the limits of what is in order to produce what might be.

### 3. From critique to an ecological metaphysics

In his recent comparative exploration of the philosophies of Kant, Whitehead and Gilles Deleuze, Steven Shaviro proposes an imagined history, one in which Whitehead is read as the founder of the postmodern, taking a place often reserved for Heidegger.<sup>64</sup> In its direct intention, Shaviro's imaginative reading of the history of philosophy is an attempt to rethink the agenda of postmodern theory. This alterative agenda produces a theoretical agenda that is decidedly constructive, and no longer simply deconstructive, opening up to the possibility of a speculative metaphysical desire.<sup>65</sup> Shaviro's imaginative project is also, though, an attempt to think

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<sup>64</sup> Steven Shaviro, *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics*, Technologies of Lived Abstractions, eds. Brian Massumi and Erin Manning (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009), ix.

<sup>65</sup> This imagined history should be kept distinct from the constructive postmodernism of David Ray Griffin. On the one hand, Shaviro himself does not draw of Griffin's constructive postmodernism, and, as we will see, there are very

Whitehead as a decisively post-Kantian thinker, one who is working with and within a thought that is given by Kant.

In this, Heidegger and Whitehead offer two alternative ways for taking up Kant. Both Whitehead and Heidegger, in their strikingly contemporaneous works *Process and Reality* and *Being and Time*, respond, Shaviro argues, to the “situation of modernity, the immensity of scientific and technological change, the dissolution of old certainties, the increasingly fast pace of life, the massive reorganizations that followed the horrors of World War I.”<sup>66</sup> On the one hand, of course, Heidegger directly draws from Kant a certain way of addressing the ontological question, as Kant is for Heidegger “the first and only one who traversed a stretch of the path toward investigating the dimension of temporality.”<sup>67</sup> Beyond this initial taking up of Kant in *Being and Time*, in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* a reading of Kant becomes the occasion for Heidegger to develop his own ontological and metaphysical thought.<sup>68</sup>

Whitehead likewise draws from Kant a certain way of addressing the ontological question, announcing, in language strikingly similar to Heidegger’s, that Kant is “the great philosopher who first, fully and explicitly, introduced into philosophy the conception of an act of experience as a constructive functioning” (*PR*, 156). This is, for Whitehead, the beginning of thinking being as becoming, being as experience as a constructive practice. This Kantian beginning is, in other words, the beginning of Whitehead’s speculative project. Heidegger and Whitehead can be seen, then, to situate their own thought in relation to Kant within a new

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specific points of disagreement. See in particular Shaviro, *Without Criteria*, xiii. For an articulation of Griffin’s distinction between the constructive and deconstructive postmodernisms, see David Ray Griffin, “Introduction to the SUNY Series in Constructive Postmodern Thought,” in *Process and Difference: Between Cosmological and Poststructuralist Postmodernisms*, eds. Catherine Keller and Anne Daniell, SUNY Series in Constructive Postmodern Thought, ed. David Ray Griffin (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002), vii – xi.

<sup>66</sup> Shaviro, *Without Criteria*, ix.

<sup>67</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 20.

<sup>68</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press), 1997.



context of late modernity, while also determining Kant to their own purpose. In imagining another postmodernity, one in which Whitehead replaces Heidegger, Shaviro is proposing a certain trajectory of thought, one which moves from Kant as determined by Whitehead and so takes up a history of philosophy that has largely been rejected.

There is, of course, something unusual in attempting to read Whitehead in this Kantian manner. In confirmation of this, it would be possible to turn to the opening “Preface” of *Process and Reality*, allowing Whitehead himself to announce that “in the main the philosophy of organism is a recurrence to pre-Kantian modes of thought” (*PR*, xi). As Derek Malone-France has observed, this claim has “exercised a powerful influence on process thinkers, leading many to simply disregard or denigrate Kant’s importance, on the basis of their conviction that Kant’s thought represents an unfortunate and unnecessary detour in the development of western metaphysics.”<sup>69</sup> Kant becomes, in this line of thought, not simply a detour, but an impossibility for metaphysics itself, so that in order for Whitehead to be a metaphysician, which he apparently and undoubtedly is, a certain bypassing of Kant is necessary. If Whitehead himself determines his thought as a return to pre-Kantian modes of thought through a serious reading of the history of philosophy, it would seem possible, and necessary, for the follower of Whitehead to likewise engage in a careful examination of his thought in order to develop an alternative history of philosophy that likewise returns prior to and so makes possible a bypassing of or at least a diminution of Kant. This bypassing of Kant would then also make possible a full appropriation of Whitehead’s metaphysical thought.

In his own attempt to rehabilitate Whitehead, and so appropriate Whitehead’s metaphysics, George R. Lucas proposes not simply that Whitehead’s recurrence to pre-Kantian

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<sup>69</sup> Derek Malone-France, *Deep Empiricism: Kant, Whitehead and the Necessity of Philosophical Theism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), x.

modes of thought allows a bypassing of Kant, but further that this recurrence positions Whitehead as an alternative to Kant. Lucas is, at this point, exemplary of a common mode for taking up Whitehead.<sup>70</sup> Figured as an alternative, Whitehead is for many, although strikingly Kantian in some respects, thoroughly other than Kant.<sup>71</sup> Lucas begins his own project by arguing that Whitehead's philosophy contains a "virulent anti-Kantian polemic."<sup>72</sup> This anti-Kantian polemic is unfortunate, Lucas continues, precisely to the extent that it is based on a failed understanding of Kant. Whitehead is forced into a limited reading of Kant because of his own imprisonment within late-century Anglo-Saxon philosophy.<sup>73</sup> Within this context, Whitehead can only read Kant as the author of the first *Critique*, and as such as a narrowly interested and minimally interesting epistemologist. Lucas attempts to trouble Whitehead's anti-Kantian polemics by demonstrating the purported inadequacies of Whitehead's reading of Kant as well as drawing a series of comparisons between Whitehead's thought and Kant's thought as presented in the second and third *Critiques*. Specifically, Lucas ends his interrogation of Whitehead's relation to Kant by wondering what Whitehead would have made of Kant's third *Critique*, especially in its explorations of beauty and aesthetics.<sup>74</sup> Although it would be possible to draw from this work a post-Kantian reading of Whitehead, which is precisely the procedure Shaviri takes, although without recognizing his predecessor's work,<sup>75</sup> Lucas himself does not follow through on this possibility. Rather, he uses his wistful longing for a more philosophically knowledgeable Whitehead to position Whitehead's thought as an alternative to Kant. So while

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<sup>70</sup> As Lewis S. Ford observes, because of Whitehead's recurrence to pre-Kantian modes of thought, it is "all too easy to interpret [him] as a traditional metaphysician, unaffected by the Kantian revolution and concerned only with the properties of being." "Structural Affinities Between Kant and Whitehead," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 38, no.3 (September 1998): 233.

<sup>71</sup> George R. Lucas, Jr., *The Rehabilitation of Whitehead: An Analytic and Historical Assessment of Process Philosophy* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>75</sup> Shaviri, *Without Criteria*, 13.

Lucas will temper Whitehead's anti-Kantian polemic by tracing it to a socially necessitated ignorance, this same ignorance will mean that Whitehead cannot be, in any meaningful sense, post-Kantian. By ignorance, Whitehead is positioned as avoiding Kant.

In what follows, by following Foucault, I want to take seriously Whitehead's own relation to Kant. For Whitehead will include Kant not only in the list of philosophical geniuses, but also designates him as a "supreme master of thought" (*PR*, 39). With this, we can see that it is within the Kantian shock that Whitehead begins his own philosophical practice. The Kantian shock is determined by Whitehead as the introduction of constructivism into the history of philosophy. This is, as will be developed in what follows, both a constructivism of that which is, a determination of actuality as constructive, which necessitates a constructivism of philosophy itself, so that philosophy becomes an experimental practice.

Yet this Kantian constructivism takes place through an inversion of Kant's thought itself. "The philosophy of organism," Whitehead argues, is

the inversion of Kant's philosophy. *The Critique of Pure Reason* describes the process by which subjective data pass into the appearance of an objective world. The philosophy of organism seeks to describe how objective data pass into subjective satisfaction, and how order in the objective data provides intensity in the subjective satisfaction. For Kant, the world emerges from the subject, for the philosophy of organism, the subject emerges from the world – a 'superject' rather than a subject (*PR*, 88).

In this inverted form, Whitehead takes up Kant precisely in order to over-take the demands of conversion within which Kant's own constructivism functions, thereby producing a material and historical constructivism. Whereas Kant, Whitehead argues, determines the world as produced out of the subject, Whitehead himself proposes, as an inversion, that the subject is produced out of the world. And so whereas the history of the metaphysics of conversion eventuates in the production of the transcendental subject as the measure and source of being, the undoing of the

metaphysics of conversion begins with a world of production, a world within which a multitude of subjects become in mutual productivity.

With this overcoming of the demands of conversion, Whitehead's philosophy "aspires to construct a critique of pure feeling, in the philosophical position in which Kant puts his *Critique of Pure Reason*. This should also supersede the remaining *Critiques* required in the Kantian philosophy. Thus in the organic philosophy Kant's 'Transcendental Aesthetic' becomes a distorted fragment of what should have been his main topic" (*PR*, 113). Whitehead returns to Kant, in other words, at his own beginning, in the Transcendental Aesthetic, when the world is determined for a givenness, now determining this givenness not as being given to nor by a singular subject, but as being given as the production of a singular subject that will continually be given by feeling its way into becoming. And it is in returning to Kant that Whitehead will have recourse to modes of thought prior to Kant. In this way, the return to pre-Kantian modes of thought is precisely a return that is mediated through and as an inversion of Kant himself. By returning to pre-Kantian modes of thought, Whitehead is not avoiding Kant, but precisely taking up Kant in the only way possible: as one who shocks with what is now possible to think.

Thinking within this constructivist Kantian trajectory, Whitehead produces a thought that is, surprisingly, metaphysical. Surprising, of course, for being both Kantian and metaphysical. Surprising as well as a metaphysics that is also experimental: the Whiteheadian project is the attempt to experiment<sup>76</sup> a constructivist metaphysical apparatus of and for intense experience. Returning again to Shaviro, this means that, directly opposed to a Heideggerian post-Kantian thought that attempts to escape the grasp of metaphysics, Whitehead "simply *does* metaphysics in his own way... He thereby makes metaphysics speak what it has usually denied and rejected:

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<sup>76</sup> Isabelle Stengers, "A Constructivist Reading of Process and Reality," *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, no. 4 (2008): 91-110.

the body, emotions, inconstancy and change, the radical contingency of all perspectives and all formulations.”<sup>77</sup> In doing metaphysics in his own way, Whitehead transforms the constructivism of Kant into a constructivist metaphysics of contingency, of materiality, of history, of feeling, even as it adheres to the strictest rational requirements of necessity (*PR*, 6). To do metaphysics in his own way is, for Whitehead, to practice a constructivist metaphysics that is an unfolding of and an unfolding within both the body and the emotions,<sup>78</sup> and a practice which arises within and as the in/consistent, the changing and the radically contingent.

In practicing metaphysics in this way, in his own way, Whitehead is taking up a place and practice within Kant that we have seen opened up by Foucault. Foucault, in other words, opens a space that Whitehead as a metaphysician and speculative philosopher has already occupied.<sup>79</sup> And yet if these two are surprisingly occupying a similar Kantian place, they do so in decidedly different ways. If we turn now to Whitehead, for reasons that will only become clear as the development of his constructivist metaphysics unfolds, we immediately face a series of decisions. A choice is made to follow Whitehead into a metaphysical ecology rather than to follow Foucault into a political ecology. Whitehead, of course, proposes a metaphysic, and so will always aim to think subjects, bodies, institutions, power and limits within an eco-logic of metaphysical abstraction. It is this level of abstraction that will fundamentally determine the metaphysical as a unique practice of philosophy.<sup>80</sup> Yet this metaphysic itself arises within a larger speculative project, as the speculation of generality achieved through a certain practice of

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<sup>77</sup> Shaviri, *Without Criteria*, x.

<sup>78</sup> Raymond J. Devettere, “The Human Body as Philosophical Paradigm in Whitehead and Merleau-Ponty,” *Philosophy Today* 20, no.4 (December 1, 1976): 317-326.

<sup>79</sup> This is the implication, if not the argument, of Shaviri’s own citing of Foucault at that moment when Kant’s text is opened to its own metaphysical possibility. See Shaviri, *Without Criteria*, xv.

<sup>80</sup> In the earlier work *Religion in the Making* Whitehead simply determines metaphysics as “the science which seeks to discover the general ideas which are indispensably relevant to the analysis of everything that happens. *Religion in the Making*, intro. Judith A. Jones, glossary Randall E. Auxier (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 84. Further references to *Religion in the Making* will appear in text, indicated by *RM* where necessary.

abstraction. To understand the metaphysic that is to come, it is necessary to begin with Whitehead's determination of the speculative project itself.

In opening *Process and Reality* Whitehead proposes an initial set of conditions that will give rise to a speculative philosophy: "Speculative philosophy is," he famously announces, "the endeavour to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted." This initial determination is then refined such that the interpretive capacities of a speculative philosophy require it to be applicable and adequate to all experience (*PR*, 3). Speculative philosophy is conditioned, then, through these four requirements: on its rational side, coherence and logic, and on its empirical side, applicability and adequacy. Beginning with the rational side, Whitehead simply announces that the logical requirement of speculative philosophy will follow from its "ordinary" meaning - "lack of contradiction." Of greater importance for Whitehead is the requirement of coherence. This he determines in a two-fold manner. First, coherence arises as a requirement from an ontological assumption about the becoming of actuality within a universe as ecological system: "no entity," Whitehead asserts, "can be conceived in complete abstraction from the system of the universe, and ... it is the business of speculative philosophy to exhibit this truth" (*PR*, 3). As experienced, being is relational, which means that, second, coherence requires that speculative philosophy must itself be relationally rational as a conceptual practice. Whitehead again offers a two-fold determination of this requirement of coherence as relational rationality: first, "the fundamental ideas, in terms of which the scheme is developed, presuppose each other so that in isolation they are meaningless. This requirement does not mean," Whitehead continues, "that they are definable in terms of each other; it means that what is indefinable in one such notion cannot be abstracted from its relevance to the other notions" (*PR*, 3). The concepts with which

the speculative philosophy develops must, in other words, be both interdependent and independent at once.<sup>81</sup>

This conceptual democracy, though, is not enough for speculative philosophy. Speculative philosophy must itself, Whitehead argues, be drawn back into the experience out of which it arises. This being drawn back into experience is the requirement that the concepts of the speculative project must be, first, applicable, verified in at least one instance of actual experience, and second, adequate, such that “everything of which we are conscious, as enjoyed, perceived, willed or thought, shall have the character of a particular instance of the general scheme” (*PR*, 3). Everything experienced, which is to say all actuality, must “find its niche” within the speculative scheme.<sup>82</sup> Which returns Whitehead to the ontological assumption of the total relational fabric of experience: philosophical concepts, arising out of experience as actuality must always be returned for their own being to the actualizing of experience. With these four requirements, coherence comes to determine a movement of thought and being through which speculation travels.

These four conditions are, as Michel Weber has recently argued, wedded to each other through Whitehead’s determination of communicative necessity, that necessity which, as Whitehead says, “bear[s] in itself its own warrant of universality throughout all experience, provided that we confine ourselves to that which communicates with immediate matter of fact” (*PR*, 4). As the maid of honor at this polyamorous wedding, as Weber continues, “philosophy does not only assume that at the basis of nature there is a determinate, formal, logical order, but also that it is discoverable by a rational inquiry – the function of speculation being precisely to reveal these intimate bonds... [T]he process of manifestation is susceptible to a revival through

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<sup>81</sup> Michel Weber, *Whitehead’s Pancreativism: The Basics* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Books/Ontos Verlag, 2006), 96.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

discursive language.”<sup>83</sup> It should immediately be added, of course, that this revival is not a revealing of Being in its ontological or metaphysical nakedness. For Whitehead, Being is always its becoming, and to reveal this becoming is to make manifest the practices of manifestation itself. This revival is, in other words, a transcendental constructivism. With this, the goal of speculative philosophy is, Whitehead argues, “to make it easier to conceive the infinite variety of specific instances which rest unrealized in the womb of nature” (*PR*, 17). Speculative philosophy becomes, then, an event,<sup>84</sup> an enticing allurements of creativity, an aid in the conception of actuality.

At this point we can realize the full extent of Whitehead’s seemingly quick dismissal of the logical requirement of the speculative project: for the speculative project, logic is superseded by eco-logic determined as ecological coherence.<sup>85</sup> Again, returning to the work of Steven Shaviro, we can say that coherence implies a “contextual solidarity,” “exemplified by the way that a living organism requires an environment or milieu – which is itself composed of other living organisms similarly requiring their own environments or milieus.”<sup>86</sup> Yet each of these environments is itself always an achievement, and an achievement that is itself always superseded. So the ecological determination of the speculative project cannot simply mean its contextual inter-textuality. This ecological world is always also a world of becoming. In other words, as Roland Faber argues, the actual, ecological world is not simply given as a system, but “*constitutes* itself within a perpetual creative transition from multiplicity to unity.”<sup>87</sup> Arising out

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>84</sup> Roland Faber, “Whitehead at Infinite Speed,” in *Schleiermacher and Whitehead: Open Systems in Dialogue*, ed. Christine Helmer, in cooperation with Marjorie Suchocki, John Quiring and Katie Goetz (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 40.

<sup>85</sup> Shaviro, *Without Criteria*, 107.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>87</sup> Roland Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).



of the relational actualizing of experience, the speculative project must now follow its own ecological necessity, succumbing to and satisfying at once the requirements of its own arising.

Beginning within the communicable and relational world of experience, speculative philosophy attempts to produce a conceptual scheme for conceiving the realizing and becoming of actuality itself, conceiving that which will, in its turn, give birth to a new world of experience, and so will require a new conceptual scheme.<sup>88</sup>

When Whitehead speaks, then, of the necessity of the speculative project, it is a necessity that is both contingent<sup>89</sup> and that is derived from experience and not determinative of experience. It is, in other words, an historical necessity, a necessity that is no less contingent for being a necessity urged on us in its incessant becoming, and so a necessity of the historical as that which is always becoming other than itself. It is, therefore, a necessity that cannot provide a limit, but which becomes the impetus for a continual practice of becoming necessary by becoming actual within the world of actualities.

#### 4. Speculating at the limits of language

In the practice of this speculative philosophy, the requirements of coherence and necessity are not simply allowed to roam where they may, to the heights or depths of imagination. Rather, the speculative philosophy is also always constrained within the requirement of the ontological principle. Although Whitehead determines the ontological principle in a number of ways across his body of thought, let us take the following as encompassing the general requirement: the ontological principle is “the principle that everything is positively somewhere in actuality, and in potency everywhere. Thus the search for a reason is

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<sup>88</sup> Arran Gare, “Philosophy, Civilization, and the Global Ecological Crisis: The Challenge of Process Metaphysics to Scientific Materialism,” *Philosophy Today* 44, no. 3 (September 1, 2000): 290.

<sup>89</sup> Roland Faber, “Cultural Symbolizations Of A Sustainable Future,” in *New Directions in Sustainable Design*, eds. A. Parr and M. Zaretsky (London, Routledge, 2011), 243.

always the search for an actual fact which is the vehicle of the reason” (PR, 40). In conjunction with and as an elaboration of the requirement that a speculative philosophy be necessary, a necessity that arises out of its being abstracted from the actual and not a determination of the actual, the ontological principle determines Whitehead’s thought as one of immanence, an immanence of reason and becoming. Reason must be a reason of actuality and actualities, just as actuality must be the reason for actuality. In this mutual determination of rationality and actuality, both reason and actuality are thoroughly historical. This is not, of course, to be done with transcendence; Whitehead is quite insistent that the actual occasion, in its arising, transcends, for the moment, and in its moment of becoming, the conditions of its arising. Yet if transcendence arises within Whitehead’s thought, it arises out of the immanence of reason and actuality, out of the immanence of becoming.

All of this takes place, for Whitehead, within the movement of a speculative philosophy, which is not simply a descriptive philosophy. Any purely descriptive philosophy, Whitehead recognizes, must become a speculative philosophy not only because of the processual nature of actuality, but also because of the limits of its tools of analysis. “Every science must devise its own instruments,” Whitehead notes, and “the tool required for philosophy is language” (PR, 11). This is, in itself a rather mundane observation, simply acknowledging that the practice of philosophy is a conceptual practice. That philosophy is always caught within a linguistic turn is not that interesting of an observation, although in Whitehead’s hands it will become quite interesting and revolutionary.<sup>90</sup> In a similar way, Whitehead acknowledges that philosophy is a practice taken up by human subjects, and so is a practice that begins with the analysis of human

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<sup>90</sup> As Whitehead argues in *The Function of Reason*, “[m]ankind has gradually developed from the lowliest forms of life, and must therefore be explained in terms applicable to all such forms. But why construe the later forms by analogy to the earlier forms. Why not reverse the process? It would seem to be more sensible, more truly empirical, to allow each living species to make its own contribution to the demonstration of factors inherent in living things.” *The Function of Reason*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1958, 15.

experience (*PR*, 159). If this discovery, which Whitehead attributes to Descartes, is fundamental in philosophy, this is, again, a function of its being made interesting. That philosophers are the one's practicing philosophy is, in itself, rather uninteresting. This realization only becomes interesting when it is further realized that this requires a fundamental rethinking of all metaphysical categories (*PR*, 159). It becomes impossible after Whitehead to simply hide from or return to a hiddenness which can ignore the human subject as the subject of philosophy.<sup>91</sup> The speculative project begins with the recognition of its own beginning as a practice of subjects, a conceptual and linguistic practice.

This practice, as a practice of language, is, for Whitehead, an always troubled practice. One is reminded here, even if Whitehead does not make the connection, of a certain Nietzschean suspicion of grammar. This is, directly, a reminder of the Nietzsche who worried that “we are not rid of God because we still have faith in grammar.”<sup>92</sup> Although Whitehead does not get rid of God, he does something much more dangerous: he demands the secularization of God as a continual downfall of God, so that God is no longer a determiner of limits but, in a way that resonates with Foucault, the transgressor of limit. And with this secularization of God comes a distrust of language, a distrust of grammar. Within this strangely Nietzschean trajectory of thought, Whitehead begins his own speculative project within a suspicion of grammar.

Although it is not possible, here, to provide a full elaboration of Whitehead's theory of propositions and language,<sup>93</sup> it is possible to briefly note that language, for Whitehead, is troubled by its own contextual inadequacy. In the opening of *Process and Reality* Whitehead

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<sup>91</sup> In light of this acknowledgment, Whitehead himself proposes a reformed subjectivist principle that can adequately account for this subjectivism, a reformed position that acknowledges the place of the philosopher and the philosophical within the historical context of speculation.

<sup>92</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 483.

<sup>93</sup> For the fullest articulation of Whitehead's understanding of language, see Stephen T. Franklin, *Speaking from the Depths: Alfred North Whitehead's Hermeneutical Metaphysics of Propositions, Experience, Symbolism, Language and Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990).

proposes two contextual deficiencies of language. First, in the practice of philosophy, Whitehead argues, “words and phrases must be stretched towards a generality foreign to their ordinary usage; and however such elements or language be stabilized as technicalities, they remain metaphors mutely appealing for an imaginative leap” (*PR*, 4). This follows from the determination of speculative philosophy as determined to the requirements of eco-logic and necessity. Again, the speculative philosophy is driven by a requirement for a rational and relational eco-logic and an empirical necessity arising from a breadth of adequacy and applicability. Yet our philosophical practices always begin with a particularity, the observation of a particular actuality arising within a particular context, observed from within a particular perspective. The speculative project is precisely a project of experiencing within this particularity and so deriving out of this particularity a generality of eco-logical and necessary import. In its particularity the content of this becoming can never be known or determined in advance, not even by God. The speculative project, then, must invest itself and interest itself in this movement of becoming, but always as a speculation, a leap, an imagining of what might become otherwise than what has been.

The speculative project must become, in other words, an imaginative as well as speculative project, or a speculative project as an imaginative project. For the speculative philosophy to succeed, Whitehead argues, the conditions of “imaginative construction” must be adhered to: the construction must “have its origin in the generalization of particular factors discerned in particular topics of human interest. . . . The success of the imaginative experiment is always to be tested by the applicability of its results beyond the restricted locus from which it originated” (*PR*, 5). To the extent that philosophical practice arises within a particular experience, it must always make the treacherous move to a broader generality, moving across

and through the domain of its arising to a metaphysical generality. This movement is, Whitehead argues, an imaginative movement, a leap, a poetic movement of language beyond the context of its own arising to a broader generality.

The imaginative leap, though, is not simply a projection, a forced generalization by which the philosopher manipulates the language of her practice to a generalization. Rather, as Whitehead argues, language itself calls for an imaginative leap of thought (*PR*, 4). In his own imaginative abstraction, Whitehead moves from the restricted domain of language, an experience of late and narrowly arising consciousness, to the more general domain of propositions, determining propositions as lures for feeling (*PR*, 25), propositions of what might be. In propositioning what might be, propositions lure subjects into becoming what they might be. In being projected across a series of domains as a generalization, propositions become contestations of what is necessary as lures into what is possible.

As lures of possibility, propositions are also productive of care, productive of a concern, productive of a certain form of mattering.<sup>94</sup> As Stengers argues, for Whitehead propositional abstractions are lures, and so must be refined to “induce empirically felt variations in the way our experience matters,” a mattering that is also, as Whitehead argues in *Modes of Thought*, a caring.<sup>95</sup> Returning, then, to the specificity of language, to the specificity of the language of speculative philosophy, the limit of language which requires an imaginative leap becomes a lure into care, a proposition to care for what might be when language becomes other than its arising and so propositions for a subject to care for an other than it has already experienced. The limit of

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<sup>94</sup> Julie A. Nelson, “Value As Relationality: Feminist, Pragmatist, and Process Thought Meet Economics,” *Journal of Speculative Philosophy: A Quarterly Journal of History, Criticism, and Imagination* 15, no. 2 (January 2001): 147.

<sup>95</sup> Stengers, “A Constructivist Reading of Whitehead,” 96. Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), 116. Further references to *Modes of Thought* will appear in text, indicated by *MT* where necessary.

language determines the speculative philosophy to an experimental philosophy of practice and propositional becoming.

Second, language is inadequate to the speculative task to the extent that it also assumes a metaphysical context that it cannot contain or exhaust. Again, moving in and out of the abstractive practice under discussion, Whitehead argues that

... every proposition refers to a universe exhibiting some general systematic metaphysical character. Apart from this background, the separate entities which go to form the proposition, and the proposition as a whole, are without determinate character. Nothing has been defined, because every definite entity requires a systematic universe to supply its requisite status. Thus every proposition proposing a fact must, in its complete analysis, propose the general character of the universe required for that fact. There are no self-sustained facts, floating in nonentity (*PR*, 11).

As Luis Pedraja argues, there is a strong affinity between Whitehead's determination of language and propositions as presupposing a metaphysic for their meaning and Jacques Derrida's post-structuralist determination of language as an indeterminate play of signification.<sup>96</sup> Language, as the tool of the metaphysician, is always caught up in a continual play of reference, attempting to secure a metaphysic which it must already make reference to, depend upon and arise out of. Yet, as we have already seen, this play is not the utter degradation of metaphysics or the speculative project, but rather puts into play its own possibility. The play of language is, for Whitehead, the possibility of generative abstraction. For language, in always referring beyond itself to a metaphysic that it can never fully designate is also always able to move beyond itself to a generality of speculative metaphysics (*MT*, 5).

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<sup>96</sup> Luis G. Pedraja, "Whitehead, Deconstruction, and Postmodernism," in *Process and Difference: Between Cosmological and Poststructuralist Postmodernisms*, eds. Catherine Keller and Anne Daniell, SUNY Series in Constructive Postmodern Thought, ed. David Ray Griffin (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002), 73-90.

Beyond these metaphysical suspicions of grammar, Whitehead also works within a series of ontological suspicions of grammar. Here Whitehead announces that his metaphysical and speculative project is developed within a suspicion of the subject-predicate form of a proposition (*PR*, 30). Most often Whitehead associates this subject-predicate form with Aristotle, or rather, when he is more suspect, the inheritors of an Aristotelian logic. This logic has imposed on metaphysics, Whitehead argues, a set of categories, the most dangerous and “evil” of which is substance (*PR*, 30). The evil of substance and the evil of the Aristotelian inheritance, Whitehead argues, is felt in the imposition of ontological mystery onto actuality and determination of the subject as simply located.

The imposition of mystery arises, Whitehead argues, from the attempt to describe the actual world from within a subject-predicate logic. Within this logic an actuality is described in terms of a set of “abstract characteristics, which are united into an individualized togetherness” (*AI*, 132). This is, Whitehead deadpans, a beautifully simple description. It is also, unfortunately, incoherent and unknowable, leaving out any interconnection between actualities. With a wonderful turn of phrase, Whitehead argues that “substantial thing cannot call unto substantial thing. A substantial thing can acquire a quality, a credit – but real landed estate, never” (*AI*, 133). This credit, circulating among substantial things without every opening into a communication, remaining always on the surface of enjoyment, must rely on a background of mystery, a “mysterious reality” that is “intrinsically unknowable by any direct intercourse” (*AI*, 133). Although he does not follow through with it, this is the opening of what could become a powerful investigation of the metaphysical mysteries that underlie the capitalist circulation of credit, a circulation that never arrives at anything but its own superficial satisfaction.<sup>97</sup> The

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<sup>97</sup> Although she does not directly draw in this passage from *Adventures of Ideas*, in her comparative study of Karl Marx and Whitehead Anne Fairchild Pomeroy hints at the possibility of reading Whitehead within an economic

mystery of substance forecloses knowledge at the same moment that it founds an economy of credit circulation.

For Whitehead, of more direct importance is the fact that this mystery will foreclose on the possibility of rationality itself. To return to the principle announced in the opening passage of *Process and Reality*, “what does not communicate is unknowable, and the unknowable is unknown” (*PR*, 4). And this unknowable mystery of substance will always remain beyond the realm of reason, shrouded in the hiddenness projected by its qualities. The subject-predicate logic will relegate any ontology trapped in its categories to remain in the irrational mystery of a surface circulation of qualities.

In leaving out the interconnections between real things, the categories of a subject-predicate logic also conceive of each substantial thing as “complete in itself, without any reference to any other substantial thing” (*AI*, 133). It should be clear by now that, for Whitehead, without such reference, an ontology that remains committed to a subject-predicate logic will always remain incoherent. Whitehead specifies the condition of this incoherence by designating these self-complete substances as being simply located (*PR*, 137). In *Science and the Modern World* Whitehead provides a much fuller analysis of simple location, one which finds its primary reference in relation to the determination of matter within space-time. Here, simple location refers to the determination of matter as that which “can be said to be *here* in space and *here* in time, or *here* in space-time, in a perfectly definite sense which does not require for its explanation any reference to other regions of space-time.”<sup>98</sup> Simply located matter can also be described as isolated matter, and as such matter that is incommunicable and so

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concern. See *Marx and Whitehead: Process, Dialectics, and the Critique of Capitalism*, SUNY Series in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences, ed. Lenore Langsdorf (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004), 68-69.

<sup>98</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 49. Further references to *Science in the Modern World* will appear in text, indicated by *SMW* where necessary.



irrational.<sup>99</sup> This irrationality, Whitehead continues, is that by which modern philosophy has been ruined (*SMW*, 55). The philosophical rejection of rationality, of an eco-logical rationality, rests on and is derived from a faith in simply located matter, a faith that is itself derived from a certain faith in a subject-predicate logic and grammar. Whitehead's attempt to develop a rational, eco-logical ontology begins, then, with what is now a necessary suspicion of grammar.

The inadequacy of language, the tool of any philosophy, and the suspicion of grammar require that speculative philosophy, as determined to be eco-logical and necessary, must always be experimental and constructivist. Experimental in understanding its own practice as a luring, a propositioning of what might be into becoming. Constructivist in continually measuring the adequacy of its concepts against a context which is always becoming beyond a completion that can be fully determined.<sup>100</sup> The speculative project becomes, then, the production of propositions, propositions that strive after an adequacy and necessity that can never be fully attained within an always productive actualization. The speculative task, in other words, will always fail in the context of a continually receding metaphysical background, and in its failing will always proposition actuality into a continual becoming.

In *Process and Reality*, as an unfolding of this speculative project as a metaphysical abstraction, Whitehead proposes an elaborate categoreal scheme which is a matrix "from which true propositions applicable to particular circumstances can be derived" (*PR*, 8). Within *Process and Reality* this matrix is produced within a metaphysical desire for completeness and necessity, and is articulated at a level of metaphysical abstraction or generality that will provide this completeness and necessity. The achievement of this metaphysical generality and abstraction, Whitehead argues, is itself a desire, a practice to be achieved, and not the starting point of the

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<sup>99</sup> Jorge Luis Nobo, *Whitehead's Metaphysics of Extension and Solidarity*, SUNY Series in Philosophy, ed. Robert C. Neville (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1986), 237-238.

<sup>100</sup> Stengers, "A Constructivist Reading of *Process and Reality*," 94.

speculative project (*PR*, 8). As we have also already seen, this speculative project is not a simple descriptive project, and so the development of a categoreal matrix is itself not descriptive. The scheme is, Whitehead argues, that from which descriptive statements can be made. The matrix is, to borrow a phrase from Foucault, a grid of intelligibility, through which it becomes possible to articulate an experience and through which experience itself becomes possible. As such, the measure of the categoreal scheme is not its finality, but the progress that it makes possible (*PR*, 14). This measure of progress is, again, an indication of Whitehead's pragmatism, which always measures progress in both conceptual and existential terms and which is always moving beyond itself.

In moving beyond itself, the categorical scheme will always be implicated in its own progress, accountable to that which it gives rise to. The categorical scheme, the metaphysics that arises out of this scheme, and the speculative project itself are all required to be accountable to the movement of the experimental practice.<sup>101</sup> Within this implication, Whitehead determines, by necessity, the Category of the Ultimate as the threefold movement of 'creativity,' the 'many,' the 'one' (*PR*, 21). Within this threefold movement Whitehead designates 'creativity' as the "universal of universals," a designation that undoes any and all onto-theological determinations of Being by returning Being to its own becoming. This return will also, and at the same time, turn the categoreal scheme and the speculative project to its own becoming beyond itself. The being of the speculative project is always determined as its becoming, just as the being of any actuality is always determined as its becoming. With this doubled determination, 'creativity' becomes the principle of novelty, which is itself the ultimate metaphysical principle (*PR*, 21). This novelty, though, is not an *ex nihilo* novelty, a pure freedom of creativity. It is, rather, a novelty that always arises within and out of that which is given precisely as the movement of

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<sup>101</sup> Faber, "Whitehead at Infinite Speed."

becoming. ‘Creativity,’ Whitehead insists, is itself the process of becoming, of the many becoming one and being increased by one (*PR*, 21). Here, ‘the many’ and ‘the one’ presuppose each other, as the movement which requires both ‘the many’ as that out of which ‘the one’ arises and as that to which ‘the one’ returns. ‘Creativity,’ as the universal of universals, can only arise as a movement within the threefold determination of Ultimacy as implicated in the movement of the many and the one, out of and back into each other.

The metaphysics of history is, as Whitehead says, the metaphysics of the many becoming one, and being increased by one (*PR*, 21). And it is precisely as a metaphysic of process, of the continual practice of becoming one, that any Whiteheadian metaphysic will be an experimental metaphysics. Metaphysics can no longer attempt to determine the world or fully describe a world that has been given in its totality. Rather, metaphysics will become a part of that which it arises out of. The turn to Whiteheadian metaphysics that follows, then, will of necessity be a turn to an experimental metaphysics that celebrates its own possibility of arising precisely as an experimental practice without origin and without limit, although possibly not without ground.<sup>102</sup>

## 5. The secularization of God

If the choice is made to follow Whitehead into a post-Kantian metaphysical ecology that has been made possible by Foucault, there still remains a difficulty to the extent that Foucault opens Kant precisely through and as an experience of the death of God. Even if we can, for the moment, remain within a reading of Whitehead that brackets the historical importance of process theology,<sup>103</sup> it is impossible to read Whitehead as advocating a philosophy of the absence or

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<sup>102</sup> Catherine Keller, “Introduction: The Process of Difference, the Difference of Process.” In *Process and Difference: Between Cosmological and Poststructuralist Postmodernisms*, eds. Catherine Keller and Anne Daniell, SUNY Series in Constructive Postmodern Thought, ed. David Ray Griffin. (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002), 8-14.

<sup>103</sup> Here, and for very specific reasons, I want to draw an overly strict line between “Whitehead” and “Process Theology.” If there is a justification for this distinction it arises from the realization that Process Theology is itself an elaboration from Whitehead that draws on a number of other sources, and is not strictly nor simply an elaboration of Whitehead. For an elaboration on the variety of Process Theologies, see the first chapter of Roland Faber, *God as*

death of God.<sup>104</sup> God is everywhere and ever-present within Whitehead's speculative and metaphysical project.<sup>105</sup> Given this, it is quite easy to forget that the unfolding of Whitehead's speculative project takes place under the strict demand of secularization.<sup>106</sup> As he argues in *Process and Reality*, "The secularization of God's functions in the world is at least as urgent a requisite of thought as is the secularization of other elements of experience. The concept of God is," Whitehead continues, "certainly one essential element in religious feeling. But the converse is not true; the concept of religious feeling is not an essential element in the concept of God's function in the universe" (*PR*, 207). Following this strange and, as we should expect, suspicious grammar, we can note that Whitehead begins to think through the secularization of God by disengaging God from the religious, an initial unbinding that allows two demands to be made. First Whitehead proposes, and here assumes, that the elements of experience must be secularized, a proposal that, within the speculative project, will come to be the secularization of the practice of experience itself. This is a familiar sounding demand, and so with this it might be possible to read Whitehead into a rather standard and straightforward narrative of secularization:<sup>107</sup> the demand for a non-religious medium or principle through which the elements of experience are united, producing a non-religiously secured subject who is able to

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*Poet of the World*. This distinction is made not to devalue the contribution or importance of process theology but in order to fully feel the necessity of Whitehead's demand for a secularization of God.

<sup>104</sup> This in spite of the claims of Donald W. Sherburne in "Whitehead Without God," in *Process Philosophy and Christian Thought*, eds. Delwin Brown, Ralph E. James, Jr., and Gene Reeves (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1971). This is to place the secularization of God that Whitehead himself proposes within an already theologically determined history, and to undercut the radical possibility that Whitehead proposes through and in the encounter with God. The question then, is not one strictly of necessity, but of possibility, and the connection between the two: God is necessary precisely to the extent that possibility is necessary.

<sup>105</sup> John Bennett, "Nature – God's Body: A Whiteheadian Perspective," *Philosophy Today* 18, no.3 (September 1974): 252.

<sup>106</sup> For Whitehead, as we will see, the demand of secularization must be kept distinct from any simple call for or announcement of the death of God, either from within theology, or as a philosophical or political call for liberation from theology. Although as Foucault reminds us, there are many deaths of God, and they are not all the same.

<sup>107</sup> As Butler reminds us, there are, of course a number of secularisms, each of which must be negotiated as a demand and a project. See, Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* New York: Verso, 2009, 102.

function in a public, and now secular, society.<sup>108</sup> In a limited sense, this is a helpful narrative for understanding Whitehead. Within Whitehead, the unity of the subject is secured neither by God nor the religious. Rather, the unity of the subjective occasion is the achievement of the concrescent becoming of that occasion (*PR*, 28).<sup>109</sup> Unity is its own achievement, completing itself in the satisfaction of its own becoming. The movement through which this unity is achieved, a movement that, in good pragmatist fashion only functions out of and back into a radical pluralism, will of course trouble any secularism that still desires a single transcendent ground of or security for a unified subject. Within Whitehead's speculative philosophy, the demand for the secularization of the elements of experience is the demand for thought to begin with the speculation of a pluralistic and contestatory movement through which a singular unity is achieved amidst, out of and back into a multiplicity without a transcendent or divine guarantee of success.

Yet this is not, as a certain secularism might desire, the banishment of God (or the religious) from the contested scene of becoming. God, as function and concept, is not to be secularized from experience or out of experience, but rather secularized with experience and with the other elements of experience. The secularization of God will require for Whitehead that the concept of God become another element within the ecological community of all actuality, of all becoming,<sup>110</sup> giving up only the privileged position afforded to an empirical and metaphysical exception (*PR*, 343).

In *Science and the Modern World*, Whitehead imagines a return to Aristotle as a beginning movement to articulate this secularization of and secularized God. Whitehead

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<sup>108</sup> Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Cultural Memory in the Present, eds. Mieke Bal and Hent de Vries (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 5.

<sup>109</sup> Andrew Goffey, "Abstract Experience," *Theory, Culture and Society* 25, no.4 (2008): 22.

<sup>110</sup> Faber, *God as Poet of the World*, 24-25.

imagines this return in light of his figuring of Aristotle as “the last European metaphysician of first-rate importance” to dispassionately consider the necessity of God (*SMW*, 173). Without opening the question of Whitehead’s understanding of Aristotle (remaining concerned primarily with his use of Aristotle), the importance of Aristotle for Whitehead lies in the fact that Aristotle, first, found the concept of God to be necessary within his metaphysical system, and second, unfolded this necessity within the strict limits of his metaphysics;<sup>111</sup> an unfolding of the necessity of the concept of God that was, Whitehead argues, without religious passion (which is, it might be necessary to add, not without passion). Hoping to follow this Aristotelian practice, Whitehead proposes that his own metaphysical system presents an “analogous problem”: whereas Aristotle’s physics required a Prime Mover, Whitehead argues that his own processual and relational metaphysic requires a Principle of Concretion; “we must,” Whitehead argues, “provide a ground for the limitation which stands among the attributes of the substantial activity. This attribute provides the limitation for which no reason can be given: for all reason flows from it. God is the ultimate limitation, and His existence is the ultimate irrationality” (*SMW*, 178). Within a decidedly Spinozistic conceptualization of reality as composed of a substantial activity and its attributes, God is the attribute of creativity through which potentiality becomes the ground of actuality. Amidst the attributes of potentiality and facticity, God functions as the attribute and principle of limitation, a limitation of potentiality so that creativity might become concrete.<sup>112</sup> If this limitation is the possibility of the concrete, of actuality, it is, for that very reason, itself an irrationality, that which is prior to and establishes the actuality of rationality.

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<sup>111</sup> Although he is correct in recognizing this initial arising of God within Whitehead’s speculative project, Christian mistakenly designates this as a “proof” of God’s existence. William A. Christian, *An Interpretation of Whitehead’s Metaphysics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 262.

<sup>112</sup> Faber, *God as Poet of the World*, 134.

The concept of God is necessary, then, as the primordial, and so irrational, principle of limitation through which actuality becomes.

This is, of course, not the only determination of the concept of God that Whitehead experiments with: throughout his speculative projecting, the concept of God passes through a series of situations in which the Principle of Concretion comes to be determined as a dipolar event of decision.<sup>113</sup> By *Process and Reality*, the Principle of Concrescence has become a principle of determination (*PR*, 345), understood as the valuation of possibility as the Primordial Nature of God. God functions, here, as the primordial aesthetic decision from which possibility enters the world.<sup>114</sup> The limitive and valuative decision that God performs becomes the felt passage between limitless potentiality and concrete actuality.<sup>115</sup> It is as primordial decision that God becomes the primordial occasion of occasions of actuality as novel occasions, grounding all becoming through decision and proposing what might be to that which arises from what has been. As Whitehead argues, God is “the actual entity from which each temporal concrescence receives that initial aim from which its self-causation starts. That aim determines the initial gradations of relevance of eternal objects for conceptual feeling; and constitutes the autonomous subject in its primary phase of feelings with its initial conceptual valuations, and with its initial physical purposes”( *PR*, 244). In short, Whitehead continues to insist that if possibility becomes actualized as occasions of actuality, God is the necessary originary event of that actualizing of possibility. Within the continuing developments of his speculative project, God remains, for

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<sup>113</sup> As Lewis Ford has argued, and Isabelle Stenger’s has made great use of, it is difficult to posit a single or even final concept of God in Whitehead’s thought. Rather, Whitehead continually experimented with this necessary but difficult concept. Lewis S. Ford, *The Emergence of Whitehead’s Metaphysics: 1925-1929* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1985); Lewis S. Ford, *Transforming Process Theism*, foreword Robert Cummings Neville, SUNY Series in Philosophy (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000); Stengers,, *Penser Avec Whitehead*.

<sup>114</sup> Hohyun Sohn, “God In Aesthetic Evolution: Whitehead’s Aesthetic Theodicy of Adventure,” *The Heythrop Journal* 50, no.5 (Sept 2009): 822.

<sup>115</sup> Shavero, *Without Criteria*, 128.

Whitehead, the necessary and originary moment of concrescence, first as principle then as event, opening the given world to the possible through valuative de-cision.

In following Aristotle as the philosopher of the secularization of God, Whitehead attempts to unfold this necessity without, as he says, religious passion. In the immediate context of the discussion of Aristotle in *Science and the Modern World*, Whitehead will add that it is also necessary to avoid the “ethical and religious interest” that has “influenced metaphysical conclusions” since Aristotle (*SMW*, 173). The unfolding of the necessity of God within the speculative project cannot be overcome or dictated by a religious or ethical passion or a metaphysically deleterious religious interest. Throughout the development of his speculative project, Whitehead adheres to these two demands by first, developing a critique of religious power and, second, by subjecting the concept of God to the demand of ecological coherence.

Whitehead’s critique of religious power is formulated as a critique of the imperialization of God and power as this has occurred primarily within Christian theology. The theological determination of God, Whitehead argues, has produced “the doctrine of an aboriginal, eminently real, transcendent creator, at whose fiat the world came into being, and whose imposed will it obeys. . . . When the Western world accepted Christianity, Caesar conquered; and the received text of Western theology was edited by his lawyers” (*PR*, 342). The theological determination of God is, in other words, the determination of power as emanating from a singular, transcendent source with absolute efficacy. And this theological determination of power is always already a political determination of power, so that power is always figured as a theo-political determination of the Law. This theo-political heightening and “glorification of power,” as Whitehead designates it (*RM*, 55), leads not only to a “barbaric” conception of God, but also to an “over-moralized” determination of the social. This over-moralization of the social, “under the



influence of fanaticism,” is the demand for a single ideal for every actuality, a single ideal of perfection, which is an ideal that can only be met at the expense of life itself (*PR*, 84, 104).

Within this religious, or more properly theological and political, determination of power and the power of God, God is deployed as the source of foreclosure on possibility through the enactment of (divine) Law. Religious passion, in other words, comes to determine God as the capture of being in orders of foreclosure. To unfold the necessity of God within the demand of secularization is, then, to unfold the concept of God without recourse to the determination of power as emanating from a single, transcendent source of absolute efficacy, which is to say, God must come to value life and not order.

As we have already seen, Whitehead’s speculative project unfolds as an ecological project, requiring a certain conceptual coherence. Here, the ecological determination of speculative philosophy requires that if the concept of God is necessary, if it comes to be a necessary element within experience, it must become necessary within an ecological coherence. Again, as Whitehead argues, “God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He [*sic*] is their chief exemplification” (*PR*, 343). If this is achieved, it will be through a secularized concept of God, one that determines God as disclosed within and functioning within experience. Any speculation of the world, Whitehead argues, that “commences with the consideration of the character of the actual world cannot rise above the actuality of this world. It can only discover all the factors disclosed in the world as experienced. In other words, it may discover an immanent God, but not a God wholly transcendent” (*RM*, 71). This comes from *Religion in the Making*, where Whitehead unfolds this determination of God within the interplay of transcendence and immanence against three other determinations of God: first, the “Eastern Asiatic” concept, which determines “God” as “an

impersonal order to which the world conforms”; second, the “Semitic” concept, which determines God as a “definite personal individual entity, whose existence is the one ultimate metaphysical fact..., and who decreed and ordered the derivative existence which we call the actual world”; and finally, the “Pantheistic” concept, which proposes “an entity to be described in the terms of the Semitic concept, except that the actual world is a phase within the complete fact which is this ultimate individual entity,” (*RM*, 68).<sup>116</sup> Whitehead confronts all three of these concepts of God, proposing instead a determination of God as the immanently transcending event of possibility. The full articulation of this transcending immanence will come only through an articulation of a politics of adventure and peace. For now, though, it is possible to simply determine this transcending immanence in terms that will apply to any actuality: God is constituted as internal relationality to all existence, becoming the singular occasion of Godself through a transcending decision, to return again to the immanence of actualities effecting the becoming of the world.

## 6. A politics of adventure and peace

If it is often easy to forget that Whitehead’s speculative project unfolds within the demands of secularization, it is also easy to forget that *Process and Reality*, Whitehead’s metaphysical *magnum opus*, is the middle text of a trilogy that has as its end civilization.<sup>117</sup> As

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<sup>116</sup> Faber, *God as Poet of the World*, 130.

<sup>117</sup> Clare Palmer has recently, and quite convincingly, presented a necessary hesitation in our reading of Whitehead’s conceptualization of ‘civilization,’ arguing that Whitehead’s own place within Western imperialism is too overlooked in a practice of metaphysical induced blindness. Although Palmer is certainly correct to insist on a certain hesitation in reading Whitehead, her own critique fails to account for the constructivist and experimental nature of Whitehead’s speculative practice and so fails to recognize the assertive risk of speculative philosophy: the demand to insert oneself as the possible moment of experience that all experience must also confront. Whitehead proposes, with this, an experimental transcendental philosophy, taking quite seriously the historicization of the *a priori*. As with Foucault, the Kantian conditions for the possibility of experience are understood to be historical conditions. For Whitehead, these conditions are not simply historical, but historicized: opened to a temporal becoming, and so open to an alteration by what is becoming, which will become an alteration of what can be. It is an ecstatic metaphysics of risk, of risking to become other, which will alter the vey ground from which being arises. Clare Palmer, “Religion in the Making? Animality, Savagery, and Civilization in the Work of A. N. Whitehead,” *Society & Animals* 8, no. 3 (November 2000): 287-304.

Whitehead proposes in *Adventures of Ideas*, the three texts *Science and the Modern World*, *Process and Reality*, and *Adventures of Ideas* constitute “an endeavour to express a way of understanding the nature of things, and to point out how that way of understanding is illustrated by a survey of the mutations of human experience” (*AI*, xii). If each of these texts can be read separately, as Whitehead also suggests, each would seem to arise with its own particular aim: *Science and the Modern World* as an anachronistically named work of science studies, expressing the nature of things as illustrated in the mutual determinations of science and culture; *Process and Reality* as a metaphysical text *par excellence*, expressing the nature of things through metaphysical abstraction; and *Adventures of Ideas* as a sociology of civilization, expressing the nature of things as illustrated in the slow drift of ideas through history. With this it is often assumed that we should take Whitehead’s claim narrowly and literally, so that *Process and Reality* becomes a privileged text, providing the most rigorous and systematic analysis of “the nature of things,” while *Science and the Modern World* and *Adventures of Ideas* simply articulate how this metaphysic is “illustrated” in science, society and civilization.

If Whitehead’s claim is taken in this narrow and literal sense, though, it becomes incredibly difficult to take the trilogy itself very seriously. On the one hand, it becomes difficult to account for the appearance of the quite innovative metaphysical and ontological arguments in the two supposedly illustrative texts. It is only with the greatest difficulty and deliberate blindness that the three texts together can be read as proposing a single metaphysical or ontological position.<sup>118</sup> On the other hand, this reading would seem to downplay what is actually achieved in the three texts as individual texts. Beyond any illustrative functions that the texts

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<sup>118</sup> See Roland Faber, Brian G. Henning and Clinton Combs, eds. *Beyond Metaphysics? Explorations in Whitehead’s Late Thought*, Contemporary Whitehead Studies, eds. Roland Faber and Brian G. Henning (New York: Rodopi, 2010).

may serve, they all also perform independent articulations of the conditions of actuality. *Science and the Modern World* enacts an historically oriented analytic of the conditions of Modern Western civilization in the science of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, with all the limits and possibilities that this conditioning provides. *Process and Reality* enacts a conceptually oriented analytic of the conditions of the societies of our cosmological epoch, within the requirements of metaphysics and with all the limits and possibilities that this conditioning provides. *Adventures of Ideas* enacts a sociological and conceptual analytic of the conditions of civilization as the “slow drift” of ideas from Hebrew and Greek thought, conditions which not only have given rise to contemporary civilization but, Whitehead argues, can become the conditions of a civilization of peace that is yet to come. Under very specific conditions, and within very specific questions, each of these texts attempts to trace the production of the abstractions through which experience is made possible, not simply in itself, but in its specific historical and social context.

Rather than simply presenting an illustration of an already achieved metaphysic, each text performs Whitehead’s speculative project. Again, the speculative project begins within a universe of given experience, within a specific historical context, arising out of that context in a flight of conceptual speculation, only to be returned to the historical conditions of its arising. And this speculation is an analytic of the possibility of what can arise as an actuality within the given of the historical. Which is to say that the speculative project arises within and as the political.<sup>119</sup> Or, more strictly speaking, the speculative project, as Whitehead argues, remains within and as the proper articulation of a transcendental aesthetic which is itself the speculation of the conditions of experience, of the becoming actual of an occasion out of that which has been

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<sup>119</sup> Douglas Sturm, “Process Thought and Political Theory: Implications of a Principle of Internal Relations,” in *Process Philosophy and Social Thought*. Eds. John B. Cobb, Jr. and W. Widdick Schroeder (Chicago: Center for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1981) 90.

given (*PR*, 113).<sup>120</sup> The metaphysic that arises from the speculative project is, in this sense, the speculative discourse of the political: the conceptual systematic of the historic conditions of the becoming actual.

With this we can begin to make sense of the fact that the end of Whitehead's speculative trilogy is civilization, and in particular, a civilization of peace and adventure. Civilization is, Whitehead is quick to admit in *Adventures of Ideas*, a difficult concept for him; we are, he says, baffled by its meaning (*AI*, 273). If civilization is to designate a particular ideal for either the individual or society, it becomes both difficult and dangerous to define. We have already seen Whitehead argue that the positing of a singular ideal for any occasion or society arises out of a fanatical religious passion, which is itself a foreclosure on possibility. Here, in *Adventures of Ideas*, he announces that the foundation of any understanding of human life is "that no static maintenance of perfection is possible. This axiom," he continues, "is rooted in the nature of things... The pure conservative is fighting against the essence of the universe" (*AI*, 274). With a speculative optimism that will always remain a challenge, Whitehead argues that a civilization of fanatical religion and pure conservatism will always fail. Civilization is, rather, a conformation of the essence of the universe, a civilization open to Adventure, a civilization, in other words, open to the "search for new perfections" (*AI*, 258). A civilization of possibility. And this openness will always be an openness to possibility that is the possibility of a radical alteration of the very conditions of its own becoming (*AI*, 260).

Yet this optimism, the optimism of Adventure, Whitehead argues, rests not on utopian (im)possibility, the impossibility of a future democracy to come, but arises as the practice of three metaphysical principles. First, Whitehead argues, "the very essence of real actuality ... is

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<sup>120</sup> See also, Alfred North Whitehead, *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1985), 39.

*process*” (*AI*, 274). This process is a synthesis of a given past and a possibility of the future, in the realization of a novel unity (*AI*, 275). This processual reality is always a movement, transcending itself in the becoming actual of creativity becoming other than itself in continual advance. Or, more poetically (and famously), “the many become one and are increased by one” (*PR*, 32). A civilization of Adventure is not simply, then, a many becoming one, but a many becoming one and so being increased by one in a perpetual becoming other.

Second, Whitehead argues, “every occasion of actuality is in its own nature finite” (*AI*, 276). The decision which is an occasion’s becoming is, as finite, a cutting off (*PR*, 43), a limiting, a production of the self as a production of otherness (*AI*, 276). And this othering production, Whitehead urges, should be the basis of political theory: the political, is, on this basis, the practice of universalization of the other, the urging forward of ideals not yet realized, not yet compatible for realization, for realization (*AI*, 276-277). Yet, as finite, each achievement of realization is always an achievement against a background of that which is excluded as not or not yet achievable. The attempted stasis of repetition, realizing only that which has already been achieved (pure conservatism), is the slow decline of civilization into the stasis of foreclosure, fixing that which has not been as the impossible to ever be. This is to make a necessity out of the contingent at the moment when “convention dominates [and] a learned orthodoxy suppresses adventure” (*AI*, 277).

Finitude is also one of the conditions for the introduction of possibility, novelty, and adventure into actuality. On the one hand, the finitude of each occasion produces a feeling of contrast, the contrast of what has been and what might have been (*AI*, 279). Adventure is, in this sense, the vigor of what might be, insisting itself into possibility as having been foreclosed (*AI*, 279). On the other hand, the finitude of each occasion of realization is the perpetual perishing of

actuality, a perishing that is also a continual opening of actuality to the possibility of what might be achieved. In the continual iterations of becoming there is a continual possibility of becoming otherwise. That which Whitehead designates as the perpetual perishing of actuality can just as easily be designated as perpetual possibility (*PR*, 60, 201).

Third, Whitehead proposes what he terms a principle of Individuality. This is to reference a double individuality within the ecological becoming of actuality. On the one hand, there is the individuality of the present occasion of experience. On the other hand, there is the individuality of the “real facts of the past [that] lie at the base of our immediate experience in the present” (*AI*, 280). The experience of these individualities is not, Whitehead insists, an experience of bare sense, but rather the reality from which the present occasion “derives its source of emotion, from which it inherits its purposes, to which it directs its passions. At the base of experience there is a welter of feeling, derived from individual realities...” (*AI*, 280). Yet this basis of individuality is not simply felt, Whitehead insists, as a background of discordant multiplicity. Certainly, Whitehead recognizes, discord is one of the conditions of possibility (*AI*, 257). As theology has long recognized, the completion of perfection is the closure of becoming. But there is, amidst this discordant multiplicity of that which has become, a “harmony of enduring individualities, connected in the unity of a background” (*AI*, 281).

On the one hand, this harmony is the achievement of Beauty in civilization. The achievement of Beauty within an occasion is, for Whitehead, the achievement of a mutually enhancing intensification of the experience of discord into a unity of becoming (*AI*, 252). An occasion achieves Beauty by achieving its own intensive unification. And these intensive unifications become the given of civilization in its continual becoming.

Yet this initial harmony, is not enough for civilization, Whitehead argues. “Something is still lacking” (AI, 284). And this lack is difficult to state. What Whitehead is after, he claims, is a Harmony of Harmonies that will complete civilization, a Harmony of Harmonies that he designates as Peace (AI, 285). This Peace is not, Whitehead is quick to point out, the tranquilizing of Adventure, or the diminution of turbulence in the process of becoming. The completion that Peace brings to civilization is not, in this sense, a final closure of all becoming. As the Harmony of Harmonies, Peace begins with a feeling, a feeling of the coordination of values in the nature of things that we have seen as the production of Beauty (AI, 286). But quite quickly, Whitehead wants to move beyond the simple harmony of the individuality of the given world. Rather, the Harmony of Harmonies, Peace, is a “grasp of infinitude, an appeal beyond boundaries” that arrives as a gift (AI, 285). It is less an achievement of an occasion than a gift to the becoming of the occasion. This gift is, Whitehead argues, a doubled gift of permanence: a gift of the permanence of value beyond the finitude of an individual occasion, which is, as well, a gift of tragedy as a remembrance of that which has been lost (AI, 286). The Peace that completes civilization is the Peace of Permanence lasting beyond the finitude of the immediacy of individuality. It is the gift that draws that which is achieved into a future of possibility of that which will come to be again. Peace retains the possibility of what yet might be, and so becomes the condition of Adventure itself. Peace is, then, the coming reconciliation of the value of what has been achieved with the tragedy of what has been lost, a reconciliation out of which Adventure comes to move through civilization.

In *Science and the Modern World*, Whitehead argues that the loss of religion in the modern world is a threat to civilization itself (SMW, 204). And it is precisely with the loss of



religion that civilization loses a vision of Adventure and Peace.<sup>121</sup> Religion, and God are, Whitehead argues, necessary elements of a civilization of Adventure and Peace, and so necessary to a politics of possibility.

To unfold this necessity, we can begin by noting that there is, Whitehead argues, an originary harmony, a teleology of harmony that is experienced as religious experience. Within *Religion in the Making*, alongside the beginning developments of a secularized God, Whitehead proposes a determination of a secularized religion. This secularized religion is designated as a “rational religion,” and is founded on a secularized religious experience, determined as a “world loyalty.” Whitehead begins both of these secularizations by adopting a fairly common determination of secularization. “Religion is,” Whitehead argues, “force of belief cleansing the inward parts”; “a system of general truths which have the effect of transforming character”; “the art and the theory of the internal life of man, so far as it depends on the man himself...”; “Religion is what the individual does with his solitariness” (*RM*, 15-16, 47). All of these determinations of religion are, it seems, claims of and for the privatization of religion. Yet Whitehead will insist that this “art and theory of the internal life of man” does not collapse into the self, drawing religion into the private realm of the self, but rather opens the self up to a greater sociality, a “world consciousness” (*RM*, 40-41). Moving beyond a mere social consciousness, religious experience produces a world consciousness that “rises to the conception of an essential rightness of things” (*RM*, 41). Religious experience produces this world consciousness to the extent that it is, Whitehead argues, a feeling of the character of the world, a

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<sup>121</sup> Atsushi Suni, “Whitehead on Religion, Civilization and Adventure,” in *Religion in a Pluralistic Age: Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Philosophical Theology*, eds. Crosby, Donald A., and Charley D. Hardwick. American Liberal Religious Thought, eds. Donald A. Crosby and W. Creighton Peden (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 361.

character of rightness. This feeling of rightness is not, to be sure, a feeling of perfection, but it is a feeling of harmony, a feeling of harmony that is a haunting of freedom in civilization (*AI*, 281).

In the final section of both *Adventures of Ideas* and *Process and Reality* this religious feeling of harmony arises from the reconciliation of the discordance of individuality as the completion of the world and civilization that is achieved as God. In the final moment of *Adventures of Ideas*, just as in the final moments of *Process and Reality*, Whitehead endeavors what we can now only hesitatingly designate as a secular political theology, which begins with the immanent reconciliation of the world in God as the Harmony of Harmonies. The adventure of civilization finds its unified rest in God, where every actuality, realized and foreclosed, evil and good, is felt in its own actuality. Civilization finds its completion in God, and so, in a sense, “the world must die into God in order to live.”<sup>122</sup>

If this appears as a problematic teleology of harmony it is also a teleology of downfall. The second metaphysical principle which civilization enacts, the finitude of actuality, introduces into actualization perpetual perishing, a perpetual perishing that God, as ecological, must also necessarily suffer. So again, God’s envisagement of possibility transforms what appears as given impossibility, as given foreclosure, into relevant novelty (*PR*, 108). This introduction of relevant novelty is itself the ground of a decision that will become the background of the given from which further decisions will be made. Whitehead proposes a threefold determination of God as “the outcome of creativity, the foundation of order, and as the goad towards novelty” (*PR*, 88). In this threefold determination, God is not creativity itself, but rather the first accident of creativity, the accident of creativity that allows creativity to become actuality (*PR*, 7). As that which presents creativity to become actual, God is both the foundation of order and the percipient occasion for creativity to arise as novelty and not simply as repetition. Yet as both

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<sup>122</sup> Faber, *God as Poet of the World*, 132.

foundation and goad toward novelty God is determined by a singular purpose: the seeking of intensity within actual occasions (*PR*, 88). With this determination of God's purpose as evocative of intensity the evocation of societies becomes a "purely subsidiary" desire (*PR*, 105). Although God is the foundation of order, this is precisely in order to produce intensity, just as societies, Whitehead argues, are necessary as that out of which intensity arises (*PR*, 83). With this, Whitehead's entire metaphysic becomes an articulation of the conditions for the ontological production of occasions of intensity.<sup>123</sup> The introduction of relevant novel contrasts opens a possibility for an order of intensity within each occasion that works against any totalized order as a complete determination of what is given, in which Whitehead will still insist that God, as the occasion of this novelty, is "seeking intensity, and not preservation" (*PR*, 105). Whatever novel possibility is inaugurated here is inaugurated not to establish another order, but rather, to create the possibility for intensity, for an intensity of becoming.

The secularization of God becomes, then, in conjunction with the secularization of the other elements of experience, the opening to a limit practice of transgression: God presents Godself as possibility, as the Primordial Nature, within an experience already occasioned by the limits of the historical precisely in order to open those limits to a possible future that has not yet been. Yet in providing this opening, God is immediately overcome in the actual: God is luring the possible into becoming, and so the opening of possibility that God enacts is, in that same moment, the downfall of God by which God is overcome in the name of possibility. In a manner of speaking, God must die in order for the occasion to become. And if this is a continual iteration of possibility and actualization, it is a continual iteration of God's downfall. It is only a

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<sup>123</sup> See Judith A. Jones, *Intensity: An Essay in Whiteheadian Ontology* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press), 1998.

secularized God, it seems, who will have the strength to adventure this continual death. A continual death that is necessary for civilization itself.

## CHAPTER 3

### A SECULAR POLITICAL ONTOLOGY

Within the end of the metaphysics of conversion it has become possible to unbind the demands of simplicity. Or this is, at least, the project that is being attempted here under the heading of a secular political ontology. In order to perform this unbinding of the simple demanded by the metaphysics of conversion, and so to develop a political ontology unbound from its capture by conversion, it has been necessary to develop two trajectories of thought, which together, bring us into a determination of metaphysics as a discourse of the political. First, we have followed a movement of thought through a reading of Judith Butler that moves out of and through metaphysics as a political unbinding of metaphysics and the metaphysical subject. Within Butler this unbinding of metaphysics begins within and arises out of the thought of Hegel, and so begins within the shadow of the end of the metaphysics of conversion. In the shadow of conversion the freeing of the subject from her being constrained within the demands of simplicity takes place through a performative political contesting of the simple being of the subject. The unbinding of the metaphysical subject is an unbinding of the demands of simplicity as that which must be achieved because it has already been demanded. Butler's intervention into the metaphysical demand that secures the simple subject is to take the performative failure of this production of simplicity not as an absence of being but as the positive site of possibility from which the subject is produced. The unbinding of the metaphysics of conversion and of the metaphysical subject of conversion is then a releasing of the subject into its own failures of simplicity as the possibility of performatively becoming other-than-itself. In other words, this is a political undoing of metaphysics in the name of possibility.

Second, we have followed a movement of thought through a reading of Alfred North Whitehead that experiments a speculative and metaphysical project that is already infected by a politics of adventure and peace. This movement of thought begins within an opening provided by Foucault and his reading of Kant. Through this reading, Foucault provides a political opening of Kantian transcendental critique, and so an opening of Kant that will render the end of the metaphysics of conversion as the beginning of a critical politics. For Foucault, this opening of Kant is not an overcoming of the Kantian critical project. Rather this opening is the beginning of Foucault's own political practice. A critical political project begins, then, within and as the continuation of a now opened Kantian critique. Given Whitehead's own post-Kantian positioning, Foucault's reading of this now opened Kant allows a recognition of the political infection of Whitehead's own speculative and metaphysical project. Experimenting a constructivist metaphysics that opens Being to its own becoming, Whitehead's speculative project produces a metaphysic that is infected from beginning to end with a political intention. With this, the political becomes the practice of the actualization of possibility at the same moment that metaphysics becomes the articulation of the conditions of actualization as the becoming of possibility.

Woven throughout these two movements of thought is, to follow Whitehead's designation, a secular theology. For Butler, this secular theology begins as a threefold critique: first, a critique of the theological determination of the subject as simple source of power; second, a critique of the theological determination of the efficacy of the law; and third, a critique of the theological determination of a temporality of guilt through which the subject is captured in and by the law. This theological critique does not, though, abandon the theological to the onto-theological history of oppression. As we will see, Butler's theological critique advances

precisely by taking up and enacting a theology that has been opened to and by this threefold critique. In other words, the theological comes to be deployed against itself. It is through this auto-immune critique that the metaphysics of conversion is unbound and the subject of metaphysics is freed from its simplicity.

Whitehead, of course, begins his own speculative and metaphysical project within the demand for the secularization of God. For Whitehead, the secularization of God begins with a doubled critique of theo-political determinations of God as a barbaric tyrant and of metaphysical determinations of God as the absolute exception to metaphysics itself. For Whitehead, this doubled critique does not lead to an absolute death of God. Rather, it leads to a theopoetic determination of God as intimate event of possibility within the becoming actualization of occasions. God arises, in other words, as the rupture and rescue of possibility within the becoming of the actual.

At the end of conversion, with Butler and Whitehead, at the intersection of these two movements of thought, we arrive at a place to articulate a secular political ontology. On the one hand, this will be a political ontology that arises within and as a metaphysical project that has been unbound into the possibilities of becoming. On the other hand, this will be a *secular* political ontology that does not abandon God to an absolute death, but that encounters God as a perpetual death that is also a perpetual opening of possibility.

Specifically, this secular political ontology will develop through the following explorations. First, following a certain Nietzsche suspicion, this secular political ontology begins with and unfolds within a suspicion of grammar as that doubt which will make critique possible. Second, this secular political ontology is determined as an analytic of power understood as a materialization which is unbound from a theological determination of power as

simple, fully efficacious, and spiritual. Third, this secular political ontology is determined as an analytic of the subject as becoming within the movement of power, freed from its determination as simple ground and capture of being. This ontology of becoming will itself be driven by both a negativity and a desire for possibility, while always arising within the constraints of an already given social context. Finally, this secular political ontology is opened up to a possibility that is itself a theopoetic possibility of a God of possibility. With this, the secular political ontology opens up to a future politics of possibility to come.

### 1. Politics and the suspicion of grammar

At the end of a long Augustinian sentence we are presented with an opportunity to re-imagine the subject. As we have seen, if this Augustinian sentence finds its final pronouncement in Kant, it is opened within the long echo of a Nietzschean lament: “I am afraid we are not yet rid of God because we still have faith in grammar.”<sup>1</sup> Within the suspicion of grammar that follows from this lament, a suspicion of the grammar through which a proper construction of God and the subject of enunciation is spoken, we find enacted the series of deaths that Nietzsche himself finds the grammar to announce, even if and as this is a grammar of madness: the death of God, the death of the subject, the death of metaphysics. Through his suspicion of grammar Nietzsche comes to unravel all that Augustine attempted to confess as one simple being. The suspicion of grammar comes to unravel the Augustinian sentence, and in so doing unravels the metaphysics of conversion through which God and the subject have been bound together within a productive logic of simplicity.

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<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 483.



As we have seen, Whitehead's own speculative project begins within a suspicion of grammar.<sup>2</sup> This suspicion is registered as a failure of language and a questioning of the metaphysical commitments present within a subject-predicate grammar of articulation.<sup>3</sup> In what will be the first among many surprising points of agreement to come, Judith Butler likewise announces that her political project must begin with a certain suspicion of grammar. This suspicion is made explicit in the opening of *Bodies That Matter* where a reconsideration of performativity leads to a determination of constructivism that the performative logic of subjectivity requires.<sup>4</sup> In this determination of constructivism, Butler is primarily concerned with challenging the critical constructivist theories that postulate – either explicitly or implicitly – a subject who wills or acts a construction. Butler is quick to acknowledge that, within these constructivist discourses, the subject of construction need not be a human subject: the subject who constructs or initiates a construction has been determined as the human but also as the social, the cultural, the linguistic, and as power itself. The subject is, in other words, not simply a human subject but the “grammatical subject position” within a metaphysics of substance (*BM*, 9).<sup>5</sup>

The grammatical subject position is, in its human form, the position of what we have already seen designated as the theological subject: the subject as simple and singular originator of action. Within an echo of Nietzsche, Butler is here working within a configuration of power and subjection where a belief in God is registered as a faith in grammar and comes to secure the

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<sup>2</sup> Within an exploration of a Whiteheadian concern for the event of truth, Catherine Keller offers a similar drawing of Whitehead into a Nietzschean critical practice. Catherine Keller, “Uninteresting Truth? Tedium and Event in Postmodernity,” in *Secrets of Becoming: Negotiating Whitehead, Deleuze, and Butler*, eds. Roland Faber and Andrea M. Stephenson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Duston Moore, “Whitehead and Marcuse,” *Journal of Classical Sociology* 7, no. 1 (March 2007): 100.

<sup>4</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex,’* New York: Routledge, 1993, 4-12. Further references to *Bodies That Matter* will appear in text, indicated by *BM* where necessary.

<sup>5</sup> Annika Theim, *Unbecoming Subjects: Judith Butler, Moral Philosophy and Critical Responsibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 35.

singular simplicity of a subject as the subject of any speaking or constructive act. As we have also already seen, the political undoing of metaphysics that is unfolded through a performative determination of the subject is an undoing of this theological and now grammatical subject of construction. So quite directly, to re-imagine power, and the subject of power, requires, Butler announces, a “certain suspicion of grammar” (*BM*, 7). This suspicion of grammar will allow a thinking of the subject not as the theologically determined simple subject who is originator of his own freedom, but rather a subject who has already been submitted and subjected to a certain subjecting and so always arises within a movement of power (*BM*, 7). In *Bodies That Matter*, and much of Butler’s early work, this submitting and subjecting is determined in relation to a gendering, so that the suspicion of grammar allows a thinking of the subject as the one who is “subjected to gender, but [also] subjectivated by gender, the ‘I’ neither precedes nor follows the process of this gendering, but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves” (*BM*, 7). In her late work, this suspicion of grammar has been developed to constitute a critique of the political subject in general, and so becomes the beginning gesture of a critical political ontology. A suspicion of grammar allows a suspicion of the subject, which is to open the subject to the questioning of its own arising.

This suspicion of grammar is also, Butler argues, an opening to a rethinking of constructivism itself. If constructivism has required a secure subject as occupying the grammatical subject position, to be suspicious of this subject is to also be suspicious of constructivism as determined as a willful act of a subject.<sup>6</sup> Within a suspicion of grammar, construction is “a process of reiteration by which both ‘subjects’ and ‘acts’ come to appear at all” (*BM*, 9). Construction, then, is the process of appearance, and if we are allowed to follow

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<sup>6</sup> Sara Salih, *Judith Butler*, Routledge Critical Thinkers, series ed. Robert Eagleston (New York: Routledge, 2002), 81.

through with this suggestion of Kantian language, construction becomes the name for the conditioning practice of the possibility of that which appears as a subject and as an act. Constructivism is, as Whitehead recognizes, the materialization as practice of the Kantian Transcendental Aesthetic.<sup>7</sup> Whitehead's own constructivist philosophy, which we have already seen articulated as a conceptual constructivism, arises out of a constructivist ontology within which actuality is determined as the material becoming together of that which has been. Likewise, for Butler the appearing of that which is actual is determined as a materialization, a "process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, of fixity, and surface we call matter" (*BM*, 9). Constructivism is then the materialization of that which comes to matter, a materialization that is always a process of coming to be.<sup>8</sup>

When and as construction becomes determined as the process of materialization it also, paradoxically, loses its standing as a strict constructivism, if what is meant by constructivism is a positive determination of being. For the process of materialization, Butler argues, is not simply the construction of matter but also the construction of the boundary through which matter is determined. Construction as materialization is a differential practice of the production of the boundary of the outside, of the limit of being.<sup>9</sup> With this Butler is continuing Foucault's project as the exploration of the limit practice through which that which matters comes to matter. It is only through this differential practice, Butler argues, that the subject is produced as a material subject (*BM*, 8). This becoming material, Butler argues, "operates through *exclusionary* means, such that the human is not only produced over and the against the inhuman, but through a set of

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<sup>7</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, Corrected Edition, eds. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 113. Further references to *Process and Reality* will appear in text, indicated by *PR* where necessary.

<sup>8</sup> Samuel A. Chamber and Terrell Carver. *Judith Butler and Political Theory: Troubling Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 51-72.

<sup>9</sup> Salih, *Judith Butler*, 81-82.

foreclosures, radical erasures, that are, strictly speaking, refused the possibility of cultural articulation” (*BM*, 8, italics in original). Not only, then, is the human produced through this differential practice of exclusion and foreclosure, but the inhuman against which the human arises is also produced as the necessary outside to the human. The outside to that which arises and appears is not an absolute ontological outside, an outside or otherness that would precede and condition the arising and appearing subject.<sup>10</sup> Rather, the outside itself is constructed within the process of materialization.<sup>11</sup> So this constructive production is both a construction of that which is and that which cannot be precisely through the differential determination of a foreclosing against that which cannot be. In this way the suspicion of grammar lays bare the paranoia by which the subject is secured against all “outside” intrusion, and the limits of its own being are established.

The suspicion of grammar within which Butler’s project arises is not only a suspicion of the subject position. As Whitehead also recognizes, the suspicion of grammar also arises as a recognition of the impossibility of totalizing the context of meaning within which a grammatical utterance is made. The scene of utterance, Butler argues, always exceeds the utterance in ways that introduce an equivocity into the utterance (*ES*, 87).<sup>12</sup> This fluidity of meaning can never be fully captured within the limits of a proper grammar. This equivocity is one of the conditions, Butler argues, for the possibility of the performative to arise: “The disjuncture between the utterance and meaning is the condition of possibility for revising the performative, of the performative as the repetition of its prior instance, a repetition that is at once a reformulation”

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<sup>10</sup> Vicki Kirby, *Judith Butler: Live Theory* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 67.

<sup>11</sup> Salih, *Judith Butler*, 80.

<sup>12</sup> Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 87. Further references to *Excitable Speech* will appear in text, indicated by *ES* where necessary. Maya Lloyd, “Radical Democratic Activism and the Politics of Resignification,” *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical & Democratic Theory* 14, no.1 (March 2007): 132.

(*ES*, 87). This is not, as we will see, the only condition for possibility within the political. Yet the impossibility of fixing the meaning of any utterance within a context which will always exceed that utterance opens a suspicion of grammar to a political contestation that is essential to the democratic project.<sup>13</sup>

Absent the totalizing context within which the meaning of an utterance will find stability, every utterance is a risk. This risk of meaning otherwise, of having one's utterance meaning something else, something other than what is intended, or other than what was inscribed within the utterance at a particular moment, is itself the risk of democracy rendered at the ontological level. As Butler argues,

If one always risks meaning something other than what one thinks one utters, then one is, as it were vulnerable in a specifically linguistic sense to a social life of language that exceeds the purview of the subject who speaks. This risk and vulnerability are proper to democratic process in the sense that one cannot know in advance the meaning that the other will assign to one's utterance, what conflict of interpretation may well arise, and how best to adjudicate that difference. The effort to come to terms is not one that can be resolved in anticipation but only through a concrete struggle of translation, one whose success has no guarantees (*ES*, 87-88).

The context within which any utterance arrives, what is here designated as the "social life of language" will always exceed the speaker of the utterance, and so will always require the entry of the subject into a field that it cannot fully control. The utterance and the subject of utterance will always be vulnerable to this excess.<sup>14</sup> This vulnerability will itself be the opening to a contestation of meaning, to a contestation of interpretation, which is precisely, for Butler, the movement of democracy itself.

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<sup>13</sup> Fiona Jenkins, "The Heeding of Differences: On Foreclosure and Openness in a Politics of the Performative," *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory* 8, no. 3 (September 1, 2001): 368.

<sup>14</sup> Theim, *Unbecoming Subjects*, 80.

The risk of meaning otherwise is not simply, or not only, a future possibility. Any utterance is always also open to a failure in its present enunciation, what Butler designates as a “performative contradiction” (*ES*, 89). Here Butler is primarily concerned with the performative contradictions which become possible when the connection between the particular and the universal are no longer stabilized within a totalizing context. In this sense, a performative contradiction is a claim by a particular to be “covered” by a universal from which it has historically been excluded (*ES*, 89-90). The utterance of a performative contradiction is, in this way, a political utterance of possibility, one which attempts to expose the limits of the universal as having been historically determined, and to expand the universal beyond its present limit.<sup>15</sup> This failure of the utterance to be contained within an already articulated determination of the universal is the essence of the universal, precisely as a futural essence. “The not yet,” Butler argues, “is proper to an understanding of the universal itself: that which remains ‘unrealized’ by the universal constitutes it essentially” (*ES*, 90). It is precisely the present failure of an utterance to already be contained within the articulation of the coupled particular and universal that opens the universal to a future articulation of that which is at present its failure.<sup>16</sup> And, in a move that we have already explored, this futural essence of the universal, the movement and practice of the failure of the universal, is also the futural essence, movement and practice of democracy itself (*ES*, 90). Democracy becomes, within and as a suspicion of grammar, a practice of the assertion of universality.

Within his own suspicion of grammar, Whitehead will also find it necessary to challenge a traditional articulation of the particular-universal relation. In what will become a major understatement for the radical reconfiguration of possibility that arises within his own project,

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<sup>15</sup> Julie MacKenzie, “Refiguring Universalism: Martha Nussbaum and Judith Butler – An Uneasy Alliance?” *Australian Feminist Studies* 24, no. 61 (Sept 2009): 348.

<sup>16</sup> Joanna Zylinska, “The Universal Acts,” *Cultural Studies* 18, no. 4 (July 2004): 525.

Whitehead argues that “the terms ‘universals’ and ‘particulars,’ both in the suggestiveness of the two words in their current philosophical use, are somewhat misleading” (*PR*, 48). They are misleading, Whitehead continues, to the extent that they suggest and are used to articulate a distinction that cannot be maintained.<sup>17</sup> “An actual entity,” Whitehead argues,

cannot be described, even inadequately, by universals; because other actual entities do enter into the description of any one actual entity. Thus every so-called ‘universal’ is particular in the sense of being just what it is, diverse from everything else; and every so-called ‘particular’ is universal in the sense of entering into the constitution of other actual entities (*PR*, 48).

The suggestiveness of and philosophical use of the particular-universal distinction is misleading precisely because it leads away from the becoming actual of any entity as a coming together of the universal and the particular as a specific actuality. Any actuality is, in other words, precisely what it is in its specificity as the unique coming together of this or these universals with this or these particulars. Actuality is then the assertion of universality in the specificity of the particular, and the assertion of particularity in the specificity of the universal.<sup>18</sup> Whether one is attempting to describe the world within a subject-predicate logic, or within a clear distinction between the universal and the particular, the result is the same: a “violence to that immediate experience which we express in our actions, our hopes, our sympathies, our purposes, and which we enjoy in spite of our lack of phrases for its verbal analysis. We find ourselves in a buzzing world, amid a democracy of fellow creatures...” (*PR*, 49-50). The suspicion of grammar gives rise to the possibility of accounting for and so participating in this buzzing democracy, of enjoying the buzz of a democracy of our fellow creatures.

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<sup>17</sup> Shoni Rancher provides an important exploration of the mutual implication of the universal and the particular as this is understood in relation to tragedy in the work of Hegel, Kierkegaard and Butler. This is especially important for the present project given Whitehead’s own determination of a politics of peace as a politics that is marked by tragedy. “Suffering Tragedy: Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Butler on the Tragedy of Antigone,” *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 41, no. 3 (Sept 2008): 63-79.

<sup>18</sup> Jorge Luis Nobo, *Whitehead’s Metaphysics of Extension and Solidarity*, SUNY Series in Philosophy, ed. Robert C. Neville (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1986), 170.

Here, then, a series of arguments seem to coincide between Whitehead and Butler: both work within a suspicion of grammar that is both a questioning of the dogma of the dictionary and the totality of the context of the utterance. Further, this suspicion of grammar opens up to an ontology and political practice of universalization and the becoming universal of the particular and the particularization of the universal.<sup>19</sup> And finally, this practice is determined within and as the practice of democracy.

To speak of a common set of arguments is, of course, too simple and too quick. A distance will always remain between the political and the metaphysical within which Butler and Whitehead work. Yet the difficulty is not with the distance itself: the suspicion of grammar which becomes a constructivist philosophy is nothing if it is not an opening to the flight which gives rise to the buzzing movement across the categories of our inherited being and thought. The suspicion of grammar is, in other words, an opening to a speculative and experimental metaphysical practice just as it is an opening to a political practice of possibility, and is the opening through which these two can be traversed. What is necessary is the articulation of this movement within the political and metaphysical openings that are practiced by Butler and Whitehead, to remain within the tension<sup>20</sup> created between these two ontologies of becoming. The suspicion of grammar stands at the site of this opening, an opening to the adventures of possibility that arise when and as the suspicion of grammar becomes a suspicion of ontology.

At the same time, as we have seen, this suspicion of grammar which becomes a suspicion of ontology is also an opening, an opening to a rethinking of the subject that will also be

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<sup>19</sup> Christina K. Hutchins, "Unconforming Becomings: The Significance of Whitehead's Novelty and Butler's Subversion for the Repetitions of Lesbian Identity and the Expansion of the Future," in *Process and Difference: Between Cosmological and Poststructuralist Postmodernisms*, eds. Catherine Keller and Anne Daniell, SUNY Series in Constructive Postmodern Thought, ed. David Ray Griffin (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002), 119.

<sup>20</sup> Isabelle Stengers, "Science and Religion: Beyond Complementarity?" in *Design and Disorder: Perspectives from Science and Theology*, eds. N.H. Gregersen and U. Görman (New York: T&T Clark, 2002), 115-141.



registered as the possibility of a redetermination of a political ontology. On the one hand, the suspicion of grammar and ontology is animated in Whitehead by a metaphysical desire for generality and abstractness. Yet this metaphysical desire will itself always arise within and as a concern for the social conditions of the becoming actual of all actuality. The metaphysical desire is, in other words, always a desire that arises out of a concern for a political ontology of becoming. On the other hand, the suspicion of grammar and ontology is animated in Butler by a political desire for possibility within the matrices of power that are the condition for subjects. Yet this political desire is always a desire that arises out of and against the background of a metaphysical questioning of that which also exceeds the purview of the subject coming to be. Being pulled in these two directions an ontology arises that is an ontology of possibility.

## 2. Becoming material

In attempting to articulate a secular political ontology with and through Butler and Whitehead we are under the necessity to think power, and in particular, power and subjectivity.<sup>21</sup> Although this is not, as we will see, a claim just about Butler, for Whitehead too is concerned with power and subjectivity, with the becoming of actuality as the becoming of subjects, it is helpful here to begin with Butler. Butler's thought has always been and remains given over to an analytic of power as that which is both condition and limit of livable life.<sup>22</sup> This is not, of course, to propose a final determination of Butler's thought, or to announce a proposed final Butlerian theory of power, as if power (or life) could become a discrete object of analysis, determined either in itself or its complete structural being. Rather, this analytic of power is a

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<sup>21</sup> Amy Allen, "Power Trouble: Performativity as Critical Theory," *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical & Democratic Theory* 5, no. 4 (December 1998): 457.

<sup>22</sup> Chambers and Carver, *Judith Butler and Political Theory*, 11.

question and questioning of possibility (the “possibilities for a livable life,” as Butler proposes in the Preface to *Gender Trouble*) as that which arises within productive movements of power.<sup>23</sup>

In focusing on this analytic of power within which livable lives become livable, it is necessary to turn to an exploration of the movements of power that are prior to the becoming of subjects of livable life, and so prior to the becoming of subjects of representation through which life becomes attached to its own being. These movements of power can, at least briefly and as a beginning, be situated in relation to Vicki Bell’s recent questioning of Butler: “from what background of indeterminate unintelligibility (impulses, desires, creativity, noise, virtuality, shadows),” Bell asks, “does the ordered world of intelligible, disciplined, self-monitoring subjects emerge?”<sup>24</sup> If Butler is taking up the question of appearance, how is this appearance possible? To address this question it is possible to turn to two moments where Butler takes up the work of Michel Foucault to think about power and subjectivity, and specifically power and the materialization of the subject in *Bodies That Matter* and the more recent “Bodies and Power Revisited.”<sup>25</sup> Central to these two moments is the attempt to think power as a doubled movement, one which both produces and forms bodied subjects, and to think power specifically as a movement of materialization. What is unique in these two moments of thought is the conceptual development whereby Butler attempts to think power by borrowing the determination of power as vectored from Foucault (*BM*, 34; “BPR,” 187). In *Discipline and Punish*, immediately after announcing that “the soul is the prison of the body,” Foucault describes the prison and the prison environment by arguing that the “materiality of the prison environment is

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<sup>23</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), xxvi. Further references to *Gender Trouble* will appear in text, indicated by *GT* where necessary.

<sup>24</sup> Vicki Bell, “From Performativity to Ecology: On Judith Butler and Matter’s of Survival,” *Subjectivity* 25 (2008): 397.

<sup>25</sup> Judith Butler, “Bodies and Power Revisited,” in *Feminism and the Final Foucault*, eds. Dianna Taylor and Karen Vingtes (Chicago, IL: University Of Illinois Press, 2004), 183-194. Further references to “Bodies and Power Revisited” will appear in text, indicated by “BPR” where necessary.

an instrument and vector of power [c'était sa matérialité dans la mesure où elle est instrument et vecteur de pouvoir]."<sup>26</sup> In both *Bodies That Matter* and "Bodies and Power Revisited," Butler takes up this brief passage, offering a determination of power as vectored. The determination of power as vectored is, for Butler, a determination of power as a productive movement which is itself a materialization, and this materialization is the condition for the becoming of the subject. In other words, power, when determined as vectored, becomes a materialism of becoming.

In *Bodies That Matter* Butler attempts to think not simply bodies, a task that continually proves difficult, nor even bodies that matter, but specifically the ways in which bodies come to matter. As the opening gesture of this thought, Butler turns to Foucault as the occasion for thinking the materialization of matter within a reworking of an Aristotelian determination of the actualization of matter. This is already to perform a certain movement between bodies that matter and the matter of bodies, and so there is a certain ambivalence, as bodies are not the only materialities that matter. In this opening movement, Butler draws two principles from Aristotle that she will attempt to maintain throughout *Bodies That Matter*: first, that the schematic form of matter appears as grammatical recognizability, and, second, that this schematic form cannot be thought as distinct from that which makes matter matter (*BM*, 33-34). Here, Butler seems to begin by thinking the body through a priority of the formal determination of matter as recognizable, and as recognized within a *grammar* of recognition. This recognition is itself a matter of mattering, a coming to matter of that which matters, and as such is a production of physical weight and a conferral of value. Grammar, then, is the entry into the infinite play of the infamous pun, where what matters matters only by coming to matter; and this coming to matter is itself a becoming of recognition. In other words for Butler, these Aristotelian principles

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<sup>26</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 30.

maintain that matter does not matter or come to be matter unless and only to the extent that it is already also recognizable.

Butler, of course, does not remain strictly within this Aristotelian inheritance. As we have already seen, central to all of Butler's work is a suspicion of grammar, a suspicion that is especially relevant here. Beyond this general suspicion of grammar, Butler brings to this questioning of that which comes to matter a concern for that which must be excluded for this mattering to matter, and this concern places her at a certain distance from not only Aristotle but Foucault as well.<sup>27</sup> In order to articulate that which does not come to matter, Butler argues that it is necessary to think these principles of materialization against the biological and natural teleology within which Aristotle develops them. Here Butler argues that it is necessary to historicize the Aristotelian principles, and so to understand the schema of recognizability as historicized, which is also to think materialization within the schema of its historically contingent operations (*BM*, 33). This is to think the formative and constitutive force of schema as the historical force of the immanence of power in and as the materialization of matter, which according to Butler is also "something similar" to Foucault's determination of the materialization of the body in *Discipline and Punish* (*BM*, 33).

Thinking within Foucault's determination to think the body as the materialization of matter as a historicizing of Aristotle, Butler takes up the problematic of the doubling of subjection (*assujettissement*) as analyzed by Foucault. This is to take up the thought of power as both productive and regulative at once. Butler argues that within this doubled conceptualization, power is defined as an operation that "produces the subjects that it subjects; that is, subjects them

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<sup>27</sup> This is, within Butler, to articulate two concerns with the negative moment of production: the negativity of exclusion and that which must be excluded for any production to occur, and the negativity of the incompleteness of any productive movement of power, the negativity of that which fails to fully materialize, that which fails to fully and properly matter.

in and through the compulsory power relations effective as their formative principle” (*BM*, 34). This is, following Foucault, to render the materialization of the body as the investment of power in bodies and the investment of bodies in power. And it is strictly as a materialization that is “coextensive” with investiture that power comes to matter (*BM*, 34). In this sense, a subject is materialized, and a body becomes, precisely and only to the extent that it is invested with and by power. Materiality is then the name for this constitutive and productive investment of power, so that the subject becomes precisely to the extent that it is materialized within the doubled subjection of power (*BM*, 34). This is the principle of Butler’s materialism, a pure materialism of power that is a materialism of becoming matter.

In the specificity of a reading of *Discipline and Punish* and the materialization of the prison, when power is read as materialization, Butler introduces the conceptualization of power as a vector: “The materialization of the prison, [Foucault] writes, is established to the extent that it is a vector and instrument of power” (*BM*, 34). In other words, the conceptual determination of power as a vector is introduced as a possibility for thinking the investiture of power as materialization. It is, it seems, precisely as a vectoring that power is also an investiture, and an investiture as a materialization. The body, as either the body of the prisoner or the body of the prison, is not only the materialization of power invested, but also the vector of power; and so the subject, as materialized in a doubled subjection, is a site of the vector of power.

To determine the relation between power and bodies through and as a vector is to think power as a movement, a continual movement that cannot be a secondary attribute of power, for power itself is this movement of investiture. This movement is a movement of materialization, a movement that is not simply the movement of bodies nor simply an acting on matter.<sup>28</sup> Rather,

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<sup>28</sup> Although a full exploration of the temporality of this production is beyond the scope of the present work, it should be noted, even if only briefly, that Butler’s conceptualization of this becoming material is not simply or properly a

the movement of power is itself the condition of matter, the condition of its materialization as matter. But this condition of materialization is not and cannot be separated from that which it conditions. Rather, matter is the congealing of power in the particularity of its mattering. Materialization is an operation of power that “can take place only within and by an operation of power. This operation produces the subjects that it subjects” (*BM*, 34). Taking place and also making a place, it is this determination of power as the movement of materialization that is the full designation of the vectored nature of power. To determine power in this vectored relation to and as the materialization of bodies is, then, to determine this relation as an investiture, so that the body is invested in power, just as power is invested in bodies.

In “Bodies and Power Revisited,” Butler continues not only an exploration of *Discipline and Punish*, but she also continues to explore the vector character of power. This exploration begins, again, within the problematic of the doubling of subjection, and so the doubling of subjection as that which acts on bodies and also, at the same time, crafts and produces bodies. Here Butler highlights that power is not simply a force, but is determined by Foucault as a strategy (“BPR,” 183). Thinking of power as a strategy entails a thinking of power and the body through a series of disclaimers and transferences which complicate the very being of the subject, for a strategy is neither appropriated nor possessed by a subject, and so, in a sense, the subject is left behind when power is determined as a strategy (“BPR,” 184). Working within a theological critique, Butler argues that the subject left behind is the subject determined as either the singular site of the possession of power or the singular site from which power emanates (“BPR,” 184). In thinking power as a strategy Foucault is proposing, therefore, a unique determination of the relation between the subject and power, which then also requires a unique determination of the

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flowing movement, but is rather an epochal, iterative movement. See especially the important footnote 8 from the “Introduction” of *Bodies That Matter* (245-246).

movement and deployment of power. When the relation between the bodied subject and power is understood as a strategic relation, it must be thought as one of active movement, and so power becomes a movement that is related to a certain becoming-subjection. By determining power as a strategic movement, Butler argues an ambiguity is produced within Foucault's determination of power and bodies, such that it is impossible to determine whether it is the body that is active or power ("BPR," 184). It is no longer possible to determine power simply as that which works on a body or subject as its object, nor to determine the body or the subject as that which deploys an objectified power outside of itself. Instead, the conjunctive 'bodies and power' must be read precisely as a conjunction, as a mutually ambiguous implication of bodies and power and of subjects and power.

The ambiguity that this relation gives rise to is materialized in *Discipline and Punish* as the relation between the body of the prisoner and the prison as a body. Butler argues that when Foucault doubles the body by using it to designate both the body of the prisoner (*des corps*) and the prison itself (*le corps même de la prison*), he is attempting to materialize the ambiguity between the body of the prisoner and the power through which that body is. In this way, the body becomes determined by and as a site of transference, as the site of the prison's materialization of the materialization of bodies. At this site, where it is impossible to determine the body simply as the prison or the prisoner "materiality might be said, then, to diverge from itself, to redouble itself, to be at once institution and body, and to denote the process by which the one passes over into the other (or, indeed, the process by which both 'institution' and 'body' come into separate existence in and through this prior and conditioning divergence). And the distinction between the two is the site where the one makes a transition into the other" ("BPR," 186). The distinction between bodies and power and subjects and power, then, is

registered not with the aid of a subject-object grammar, but as and within the movement of power as a materialization. As we have seen, power as the movement of a materialism of becoming matter is precisely a movement of investiture, where to become material is to become within and as a materialization of power. For Butler, this is to redefine both the body and power through the language of a 'nexus,' where the body as a 'nexus' redefines power as that which is strategy, activity, dispersion and transvaluation. Here, then, the 'nexus' redefines the body as that which is "a kind of undergoing, the condition for a redirection, active, tense, embattled" ("BPR," 186-187). To speak, then, of the body as a nexus is to determine the body as a site of transference, as the site of the continual materialization of that which becomes precisely as a materialization of power, a materialization that occurs precisely through and as a contestation, a tensed battle of power within and against itself in its becoming other as a materialization. And it is precisely this becoming other that is the condition for the determination of 'the' body as the body of the prisoner or the prison as a body.

In order to avoid a certain reduction of Foucault to Deleuze, Butler further determines this movement of power through and with the body as a nexus by returning again to the language of vectoring, such that materiality is itself, as in *Bodies That Matter*, a continual movement of materialization. In "Bodies and Power Revisited," the possibility of thinking power as a vector, as a movement of materialization, is produced through a series of negations: the body is not a substance, a thing, a set of drives, or a "cauldron of resistant impulse" ("BPR," 187). Within the space opened by these negations the body becomes the "site of the transfer for power itself" ("BPR," 187). The body is a site of transfer *for* power, which is not simply a site of power, but somehow other than that. It is a site constituted as the movement of power itself, a taking place that is the making of a place of matter. Here, movement is not simply the movement of flow, but



the movement of iteration, of citational repetition: the movement of the event as the repetition which creates movement and in this creates a place of becoming. It is from within this place that bodies come to matter, where matter is determined as the body of the prisoner or the prison as a body. Thus, to speak of the body as the site for power is to speak of the body as strictly nothing more or less than the materialization of power, as the site where power materializes precisely by becoming other than itself in its movement of materialization.

At this point, having briefly introduced the conceptualization of the body as a nexus it seems that we are now compelled to turn to Whitehead. There is much that can be achieved through Butler's thinking power as a vectored materialization that is and can be amenable to Whitehead's own conceptualizations of power. For Whitehead the determination of power as vectored is the means for thinking power as productive, prehensive feeling. Whitehead argues that "the vector character of prehension is fundamental," so that the vector character of prehension is precisely the means for understanding power as a prehensive movement; it is, as Whitehead says, the feeling of what was there, here (*PR*, 87, 317). Whitehead's own determination of power as vectored begins with a series of translations. First, there is the translation from vector physics to metaphysics. In a reverse translation of the present concern, Whitehead argues that "mathematical physics translates the saying of Heraclitus, 'All things flow,' into its own language. It then becomes, All things are vectors" (*PR*, 309). Here Whitehead argues that a straightforward translation between physics and metaphysics is possible. The metaphysical movement of becoming can, in a quite direct way, be rendered by the mathematical language of vectors, for both are determinations of actuality as movement, a movement that Whitehead will determine as becoming. The specificity of this becoming is both

that which determines all actuality, and is determined as a movement that is rendered in both physics and philosophy by determining the nature of actuality as vectored.

With this first translation in place, it becomes possible to perform a second translation, whereby the constitutive movement of this becoming is rendered as ‘power.’ For Whitehead this second translation arises from the necessity to think power as constitutive of actuality.<sup>29</sup> As he argues, “in order to understand ‘power,’ we must have a correct notion of how each individual actual entity contributes to the datum *from which* its successors arise and *to which* they must conform” (*PR*, 56, emphasis in original). Here, Whitehead draws a principle of power from John Locke, namely “the principle that the ‘power’ of one actual entity on the other is simply how the former is objectified in the constitution of the other” (*PR*, 58). There is, of course, nothing simple about this principle, either in its elaboration or its functioning. To risk an oversimplification, it seems that within the strict requirements of the ontological principle, the being of an actual occasion is the achievement of having become as a concrescent process of unity out of that which is given. And this process of unification is itself an achievement that is aimed at a becoming-constitutive cause for other actual occasions. This achievement is what Whitehead will name as the “subject-superject,” which is

the purpose originating the feelings. The feelings are inseparable from the end at which they aim; and this end is the feeler. The feelings aim at the feeler, as their final cause. The feelings are what they are in order that their subject may be what it is. Then transcendently, since the subject is what it is in virtue of its feelings, it is only by means of its feelings that the subject objectively conditions the creativity transcendent beyond itself (*PR*, 222).

As will be seen, this causation by feeling is not simply the causation of an external relation, but is the power of objectification within the constitutive becoming of another actual occasion (*PR*, 58). With this, Whitehead transforms what begins with Locke as an epistemological concern

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<sup>29</sup> Nobo, *Whitehead's Metaphysics of Extension and Solidarity*, 144.

with power into an ontological determination of power as the real internal constitution of a subject through the objectification of its past.<sup>30</sup> It is in attempting to meet the necessity to think power as that which is constitutive of actuality that Whitehead comes to a determination of the vector character of feeling:

Primitive experience is ‘vector feeling,’ that is to say, feeling from a beyond which is determinate and pointing to a beyond which is to be determined. But the feeling is subjectively rooted in the immediacy of the present occasion: it is what the occasion feels for itself, as derived from the past and as merging into the future (*PR*, 163).

The vector character of the feeling becomes, then, the means for thinking power as the constitutive contribution of one actuality to another: a feeling of what has been, to what is, to what will be. From physics to metaphysics, the vector character of actuality becomes the means for conceptualizing the constitutive force of past actual entities in the moment of subjectivity, a constitutive force determined as ‘power.’

For Whitehead, to determine power as constitutive objectification is to determine power within creativity, and so within the metaphysical movement of becoming. Significantly, Whitehead concludes his long discussion of Locke and power by designating as the “doctrine of organism” the “attempt to describe the world as a process of generation of individual actual entities” (*PR*, 60). As metaphysically and ontologically determined, power is the movement of generation. This is a movement of what has been into what is becoming, by way of objectification. When this generative objectification is determined as the vector character of prehension, power is the feeling of “what is *there*” transformed into “what is *here*” (*PR*, 87). It is the movement of what was there to what is, here and now. Power as movement is not simply a movement to that which is becoming, but it is a movement *to* only as a movement *within*. This is

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<sup>30</sup> Ernest Wolf-Gazo, “Whitehead and Locke’s Concept of ‘Power,’” *Process Studies*, 14, no. 4 (Winter, 1985): 237.

a movement that is constitutive as the felt internal constitution of that which is becoming out of that which has been. To speak of power as a vectored movement is to determine power as the movement of inter-exchange between occasions, and is the moment when what has been passes over into that which is becoming. As vectored, power becomes the very name for the constitutive process of this movement.

To determine power as constitutive objectification and vectored is to determine power as doubled. This is to think the doubling of power as constitutive becoming within the givenness of that which has become; a givenness that is both the condition for the becoming of any actual occasion and the imposition of a certain intensive feeling of becoming.<sup>31</sup> As has already been noted, for Whitehead, power must itself be understood as “how each individual actual entity contributes to the datum *from which* its successors arise and *to which* they must conform” (*PR*, 56). Within this demand for thinking power as doubled, Whitehead argues that all actual things are both object and subject within the movement of creativity. As object, it provides the conditions from which and out of which each actual occasion arises. As subject, it becomes through the prehensive unification of the universe of its becoming (*PR*, 56-57).

Yet as doubled, this movement of power is not exhausted as the positive condition for the arising of the actual occasion. It is also, Whitehead argues, the “imposition of conformity” on that very arising (*PR*, 56). As such, each actual occasion will always retain the “vector marks of its origin” (*PR*, 117), always remaining within the imposition of the conditions of its becoming.<sup>32</sup> The actual world of that which has been achieved, and so that which is given as the condition from which each occasion arises, presents itself as a limit of what that occasion can become. The mark of the given is the mark of limitation, an originary limitation of what can be (*PR*, 65).

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<sup>31</sup> Hutchins, “Unconforming Becomings,” 124.

<sup>32</sup> Nobo, *Whitehead's Metaphysics of Extension and Solidarity*, 354.

As originary, Whitehead determines this limitation as conformation, for it is a re-enactment of the given world as the originating condition from which an actual occasion arises. If this originating condition can be felt differently, a limit that functions only to be transgressed and passed beyond, this transcendent movement will always remain within the space of its origination.<sup>33</sup> As Whitehead strictly argues, “No actual entity can rise beyond what the actual world as a datum from its standpoint – *its* actual world – allows it to be” (*PR*, 83). To think power as doubled is then, for Whitehead, always to think both the condition for the becoming of an actual occasion and to think this condition as that which will leave its mark in the being of the becoming occasion.

This doubling of power is itself a determination that fundamentally undermines the distinction between efficient and final causation, the traditional philosophical problematic of power with which Whitehead begins his questioning of power. For vectored power, specifically as prehensive feeling, has a “dual nature” of being both cause and effect of becoming (*PR*, 237). When power is thought as the vectored transition of objectification, the feeling of another actuality as the constitutive and originary movement of becoming, the actual occasion is no longer simply the separable moment of a private final causation, but is rather the moment of transition within the movement of power itself.<sup>34</sup> Thus the actual occasion becomes not simply that which arises from an efficient cause to become by its own final cause, but rather the site of becoming where efficient and final cause reduplicate themselves in the production of intensity.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> The already achieved is not the only condition of the arising of a new occasion. For Whitehead, God is also present as a certain limit and possibility, even if this is, finally, an irrational limit. But even here, God becomes presented as limit and possibility to be overcome in the decision of actuality. See especially, the discussion of God in *Science and the Modern World*, New York: The Free Press, 1967, 173-179. Further references to *Science and the Modern World* will appear in text, indicated by *SMW* where necessary.

<sup>34</sup> Inna Semetsky, “The Magician in the World: Becoming, Creativity, and Transversal Communication,” *Zygon: Journal of Religion & Science* 44, no.2 (June 2009): 330.

<sup>35</sup> Judith A. Jones, *Intensity: An Essay in Whiteheadian Ontology*, The Vanderbilt Library of American Philosophy, ed. Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr. (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1998), 32-33.

At the moment when the vector character of a prehension is determined as feeling, Whitehead returns to the materiality of power itself. For within the concrescent becoming of an actual occasion, the most primitive form of feeling, and the “bricks” from which all actuality is built, are simple physical feelings. These are quite simply, Whitehead announces, “the feeling of another actuality” (*PR*, 225). With this the becoming material of an actual occasion begins with simple physical feeling, the feeling of another actuality as a duplicated vector of power (*PR*, 237). Certainly, this is only the beginning of a process of becoming materially actual for Whitehead.<sup>36</sup> The becoming material of an actual occasion is only fully determined as, first, the determinate material actuality of an actual occasion as the becoming actual of the phases of concrescence eventuating in a satisfaction of subjective character. Second, this becoming material of an actual occasion is itself understood within and as an atomization of the extensive continuum, and so as arising within the becoming relations of a space-time extensivity (*PR*, 67). Finally, within a certain determination to think metaphysically, and not merely culturally or politically, Whitehead determines the materiality of bodies as an achievement of coordination among materialized actual occasions (a coordination which is not itself nor strictly an actual occasion). Even with the achievement of materiality that is to come, it remains that the primal movement of becoming material is found in the simplicity of the vectored prehension of actuality for Whitehead. The movement of this primal feeling is, as he argues, a doubling of power, and so “a partial identification of cause with effect, and not a mere representation of the cause” (*PR*, 237). Moving finally and fully beyond representation, power becomes a material reduplication beyond itself, and so a becoming materialization.

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<sup>36</sup> As Clare Palmer has noted, in drawing on William James’ conceptualization of actuality as “drops of experience” Whitehead is already given over to a determination of becoming actuality and experience as material. See Clare Palmer, *Environmental Ethics and Process Thinking* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 2.

At this point, we seem to arrive at a certain impasse. On the one hand, it is now possible to articulate the contours of a determination of power as vectored: power as vectored is both a movement, a movement of constitutive materialization that is both condition and limit of becoming, and, quite strictly, a materialism: a becoming materialization that is the movement of power itself in its becoming other than itself. Yet here, Bell's questioning of Butler and our guiding question seems to arise at its most insistent: "from what background of indeterminate unintelligibility (impulses, desires, creativity, noise, virtuality, shadows) does the ordered world of intelligible, disciplined, self-monitoring subjects emerge?"<sup>37</sup> To speak simply of a singular determination of power as vectored risks overlooking the difficulty that the very possibility of articulating a prior materialism presents. In other words, what exactly could Butler mean by designating the movement of power that is vectored materialization as the "prior and conditioning" movement of the becoming of bodies, subjects and institutions? Is this the same priority that Whitehead gives to primary physical feelings, as the constitutive and originary feelings of the subject-superject?

In *The Psychic Life of Power* Butler again takes up an exploration of materialism, here discussing it within the notions of interpellation and ritual. The originating concern of Butler's reading of interpellation in Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,"<sup>38</sup> is the relation between the production of the ideologically determined subject, and the place of the conscience within this production. This concern with the conscience is itself an attempt to figure the relation between the call and the response in Althusser's paradigmatic scene of ideological hailing. Here Butler asks why the response to the officer's hail is a turn, a turning to which is a turning into the call. "What kind of relation," Butler wonders, "already binds these

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<sup>37</sup> Bell, "From Performativity to Ecology," 397.

<sup>38</sup> Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 127-186.

two such that the subject knows to turn, knows that something is to be gained from such a turn? How might we think of this ‘turn’ as prior to subject formation, a prior complicity with the law without which no subject emerges?” (*PLP*, 107).<sup>39</sup> And so, again, Butler raises the question of a certain priority, a prior relational becoming of that which is prior to the subject.

Within “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” interpellation is articulated as an analytic of the production of subjects as the ideological reproduction of the means and relations of production;<sup>40</sup> yet “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” concludes with recourse to an example of and mechanism for subject formation in Christian theology. As Butler argues, this exemplary status of theology as it appears in Althusser’s text is extremely problematic (*PLP*, 114). Althusser’s recourse to the exemplary status of Christian theology, rather than further elucidating the function of interpellation, is precisely that which hides a prior productivity whereby the subject is already determined as a subject that can be hailed and will be attached to that hailing.<sup>41</sup> For Butler, if interpellation is to be a useful concept for understanding the mechanism of the production of subjects, then it will be necessary to explore these prior mechanisms that allow the hail itself to function.

In attempting to uncover the prior mechanisms of production that are hidden within the exemplarity of theology in Althusser’s determination of interpellation, Butler turns to ritual as the means to dislocate the securely structured theo-ideological subject. This turn to ritual dislocates the theo-ideological subject by returning the subject to the history of its own

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<sup>39</sup> Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories In Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 107. Further references to *Psychic Life of Power* will appear in text, indicated by *PLP* where necessary.

<sup>40</sup> Deborah Youdell, “Subjectivation and performative politics—Butler thinking Althusser and Foucault: intelligibility, agency and the raced—nationed—religioned subjects of education,” *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 27, no. 4 (Sept. 2006): 516.

<sup>41</sup> Within the exemplary, interpellation produces ideologically secure subjects through a doubled recognition: the subject recognizes that “he is a subject, a subject of God, a subject subjected to God, a *subject through the Subject and subjected to the Subject*,” (179) which then becomes the mechanism of interpellation in general. Interpellation, in this sense, is understood as the production of subjects in replication of the Subject, the Divine Subject.



production. This return uncovers what Butler designates as a certain “disposition,” a “certain readiness to be compelled by the authoritative interpellation, a readiness which suggests that one is, as it were, already in relation to the voice before the response” (*PLP*, 111). Prior to *Giving an Account of Oneself*, this prior relation to the law is figured by Butler, following Nietzsche, primarily as a relation of guilt and a guilty conscience, and it is this guilty relation that Butler finds operative in Althusser’s account of interpellation.<sup>42</sup> In this way, the exemplary status of the theological subject in Althusser’s determination of interpellation “underscores the paradox of how the very possibility of subject formation depends upon a passionate pursuit of a recognition which, within the terms of the religious example, is inseparable from a condemnation” (*PLP*, 113). It is precisely this paradox that remains as specifically unthematized in and through interpellation when it is covered within a theological guise.

If this paradox, as the founding movement of the subject, will remain the non-narrativizable prehistory of the subject (*PLP*, 112), the dislocation of the subject in this opening to its own becoming will also be a dislocation of the thematization of interpellation as the becoming of the subject. For Butler this means that the narrative of the subject who turns to face the law will no longer have as its primary agent the subject coming to be in subjection (i.e. the willful and intentional subject who is the author of her own act of being). Rather, the movement of power through this becoming subject will become the analytic theme, and it is this movement of power that is analyzed in and through ritual.

The movement to determine the prior of interpellation as ritual begins with the recognition that, within Althusser, consciousness and a conscience, the conscience through

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<sup>42</sup> The clearest statement of this determination of the subject as arising within a guilty conscience is found in “Circuits of Bad Conscience; Nietzsche and Freud,” in *PLP*, 63-82. This articulation of the place of the guilty conscience in subject production is rethought in *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 15. Further references to *Giving An Account of Oneself* will appear in text, indicated by *GAO* where necessary.

which the hail becomes effective, arises with the ideological re-production of skills, with the acquisition and mastery of the skills to “speak properly” (*PLP*, 115).<sup>43</sup> This acquisition and mastery, though, is not figured simply as a knowledge or a learning; it is figured, by Althusser, as submission, so that, as Butler argues, “the more a practice is mastered, the more fully subjection is achieved. Submission and mastery take place simultaneously, and this paradoxical simultaneity constitutes the ambivalence of subjection” (*PLP*, 116). The terms within which this mastery is described are important for Butler, to the extent that Althusser argues that the mastery of ideological skills is a conscientious acquitting of oneself (“pour s’acquitter ‘consciencieusement’ de leur tâche”) (*PLP*, 118).<sup>44</sup> This is, then, to propose that the acquisition of skills, the becoming subject to ideology through the mastery of skills, is also an acquitting of oneself in a moral, and as Butler argues, religious sense. The submission to the ideological skills that is their mastery is then “a submission to the necessity to prove innocence in the face of accusation, a submission to the demand for proof, an execution of that proof, and acquisition of the status of the subject in and through compliance with the terms of the interrogative law” (*PLP*, 118). Therefore, the labor of this becoming mastered by ideological skills is a confession, a confession of innocence through the deed of submission.

But the mastery of skills as the ideological production of conscience, is not simply, Butler argues, to follow a set of rules. For to follow a set of rules, it seems, would be to remain within an external relation to those rules, at most internalizing them into one’s practice as the guide of practice.<sup>45</sup> Rather, the ideological mastery of a practice is “to embody rules in the course of

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<sup>43</sup> Althusser, “ISA,” 132.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>45</sup> One of the major aims of *The Psychic Life of Power* is to interrogate and contest this very notion of internalization. As Butler argues in the Introduction, the “process of internalization *fabricates the distinction between interior and exterior life*.... Moreover, given that norms are not internalized in mechanical or fully predictable ways, does the norm assume another character as a *psychic* phenomenon?” (19).

action and to reproduce those rules in embodied rituals of action” (*PLP*, 119). Amy Hollywood, in her reading of Butler’s turn to ritual, is certainly right in focusing on the temporal element of ritual: the turn to ritual is, for Butler, a turn to the repetitive nature of the performance of these ideological skills of being.<sup>46</sup> But here, as in *Excitable Speech*,<sup>47</sup> the emphasis of Butler’s deployment of ritual is on the assumption of rules into a bodied and embodied being as a practice.<sup>48</sup> It is in ritual, then, that Butler finds a new principle of materialism, the practice of a becoming material that is prior to, although not separable from, the becoming subject hailed in interpellation. “If,” Butler argues, “ideology is material to the extent that it consists in a set of practices, and practices are governed by rituals, then materiality is defined as much by ritual and repetition as it is by more narrowly empiricist conceptions. Moreover, the rituals of ideology are material to the extent that they acquire a *productive* capacity and, in Althusser’s text, what rituals produce are subjects” (*PLP*, 125, emphasis in original). It is this prior materialization, a materialization as the ritualization of ideology, through which the prior to interpellation is thematized as a prior becoming material.<sup>49</sup> Although this prior cannot be given an ontologically distinct temporality of being, it is only out of this prior materialization that conscience itself arises, a consciousness of one’s being called already into a hail of one’s being.

If this is a determination of the materialization of power, and so a determination of materialism as ritual, it strangely misses the very materialization of power that is so important to

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<sup>46</sup> Amy Hollywood, “Performativity, Citationality, Ritualization,” *History of Religions* 42, no.2 (Nov. 2002): 97.

<sup>47</sup> See, in particular, *Excitable Speech*, ch. 4 “Implicit Censorship and Discursive Agency,” 127-163.

<sup>48</sup> In *Bodies That Matter* ‘assumption’ becomes a key concept for Butler in thinking the relation between the structural rules and Laws of being, and the bodies that must conform to those rules and Laws. Assumption is, in this reading, a taking up into the bodily which will at once also be a contestation of any ontological priority to either the Law or the body that is assumed. See, in particular, ch. 3 “Phantasmic Identification and the Assumption of Sex.”

<sup>49</sup> It is at this point that Kotsko’s otherwise helpful reading of Butler goes astray. For Kotsko, the primary consequence of Butler’s reading of Althusser here is to develop the “‘secondary’ epiphenomena” of ideological production – conscience – as the site of ideological change, missing the more important development of a ritualized materialism. See Adam Kotsko, “The Failed Divine Performative: Reading Judith Butler’s Critique of Theology with Anselm’s *Fall of the Devil*,” *The Journal of Religion* 88, no. 2 (April 2008): 220.

Foucault at that moment where a materialism of vectored power is introduced. As has been seen, the determination of power as vectored is achieved precisely in order to account for the scene of materialization, when the materiality of the body of the prison is no longer distinguishable from the body of the prisoner as the movement of power itself, through both the prison and the prisoner. This is to understand materialism and the materiality of bodies as not simply the materiality of human bodies, but as a materialism within which and amidst which all bodies arise. This is a materialization, in other words, of not simply bodies, but *the entire material ecology of any becoming*. And yet it is precisely this materialization that is missing from Butler's invocation of Althusser.<sup>50</sup> For as Althusser determines the scene of his own theoretical work, a certain assumption is already at work within which the scene of hailing occurs: "the theoretical scene," Althusser argues, "takes place in the street".<sup>51</sup> It is precisely this materialization, a materialization that no longer occurs between the prison as a body and the body of the prisoner, but as the materialization between a street and a body, that is absent from Butler's own determination of the prior materialization of power in the production of the interpellated subject.<sup>52</sup>

In this specific case, within Butler's reading of Althusser, it seems that what is missing is an awareness of the distance between a politics of normalization and the "global procedure" that Althusser follows.<sup>53</sup> For Butler's own determination of materialism as a movement of power that is a normalization will always require that a certain priority be given to the production of

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<sup>50</sup> Although focusing on Butler's determination of the *polis* in *Antigone's Claim*, Stuart Elden also notes the often missing place of Butler's theoretical work. See Stuart Elden, "The Place of the Polis: Political Blindness in Judith Butler's *Antigone's Claim*," *Theory & Event* 8, no.1 (2005).

<sup>51</sup> Althusser, "ISA," 174.

<sup>52</sup> Lise Nelson, "Bodies (and Spaces) do Matter: the limits of performativity," *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 6, no.4 (December 1999): 351.

<sup>53</sup> Althusser, "ISA," 129.

human bodies, of bodies that exist with and for a body politic of the human.<sup>54</sup> It is, in other words, within a political scene, reduced to a politics of the human, which takes place on a street that has already been planned, laid-out, and regulated. The material scene within which a subject becomes is itself already assumed, assumed to already be in place, and so the rituals of ideological production, as Butler determines these, already take place within this scene that has already been determined. It is the production of this site within which the scene of interpellation takes place that has been lost sight of.<sup>55</sup>

To open up this materialization, an ecological materialization, it is necessary to pause for a moment, at that moment just prior to power being given over to the political production and normalization of human bodies when power remains the movement of materialization that is the production not simply of human bodies, but of the bodies of ritual sites, bodies of institutions, bodies of streets. It is necessary, in other words, to remain within the parenthetical, where power is “the process by which both ‘institution’ and ‘body’ come into separate existence in and through this prior and conditioning divergence” (“BPR,” 186). For Butler it is at this moment, that power is the *prior* condition in its divergence from itself, for the existence of both institutions and bodies.

This is a pause that is also occasioned by Whitehead’s determination of vectored power as prehensive feeling. Straining within a grammar that cannot be escaped, Whitehead proposes that the proper determination of the subject as a ‘superject,’ is as that to which feeling directs itself, without depending for its origination on an already achieved subject (*PR*, 222). Struggling to think power as that which is determined prior to the achievement of subjectivity, Whitehead

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<sup>54</sup> Karen Barad, “Getting Real: Technoscientific Practices and the Materialization of Reality,” *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 10, no.2 (1998): 91.

<sup>55</sup> Karen Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no.3 (2003): 801-831.

argues that the simple originary feelings of an occasion are without consciousness, language, representation, and entry, and we might argue, into the political. Feelings are, in other words, a determination of power within a metaphysical ecology of becoming out of which and within which the political itself will be seen to arise. And yet, as feeling, the priority of this originary feeling is not itself the priority of ontological distinction. It is rather that reproduction gives rise to representation, and that this is itself a unique occasion.<sup>56</sup> And so here the feeling of power as vectored, the feeling of reproduction, precedes the political, not as its ontological outside, nor as its other or condition of failure, but as the movement of a materialism that is itself the condition for the possibility of bodies. Within the parenthetical of a political ecology of a materialism of becoming, metaphysics intervenes to open to us the matters of our own becoming.

### 3. Melancholy feelings

Materialism, as the movement of power, always presents the risk of a certain positivism: a positivism of pure, unlimited becoming of that which is. To the extent that materialism must also now be understood as a becoming actual and so also a historicized materialism, the temptation becomes one of historical positivism. With this, materialism would present a totalitarian foreclosure on possibility, a foreclosure that has most often operated under the name of progress. On the one hand, this totalitarian foreclosure can be opened by an absence, an absence of being at the heart of all becoming.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, and to be clearly distinguished from the first, the totalitarian foreclosure on possibility can also be opened by the movement of the negative, the movement of negativity. This is, as will become clear, the path taken by Butler and Whitehead.

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<sup>56</sup> Stephen T. Franklin, *Speaking from the Depths: Alfred North Whitehead's Hermeneutical Metaphysics of Propositions, Experience, Symbolism, Language, and Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 28.

<sup>57</sup> In its modern form, this trajectory of thought can be roughly traced from Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel, through Heidegger's Kierkegaard inflected reading of Kant, and through Lacan to the politics of lack he inspires.

For Butler, this movement of the negative begins with and through a reading of Hegel, and so begins within an inherited metaphysical discourse. As we have seen, though, with Butler this metaphysical discourse is undone in and through the political. To trace the movement of the negative, then, we can begin not with the metaphysical but with the political, and Butler's most directly political work, *Precarious Life*.<sup>58</sup> *Precarious Life* is, among other things, Butler's attempt to think responsibly after the events that have come to be signified simply by 9/11. "9/11" is no longer a simple signifier, but is rather an entire narrative; a narrative of violation, violence, and retaliation. To think responsibly after 9/11, for Butler, is to think a response to violation and violence that does not itself continue the movement of violence (*PL*, xii). Within this proposal to think violence otherwise two conceptual orders arise. On the one hand, there is the ordering that will bring violation, violence, and grief together as the political movement of the negative; on the other hand, there is a joining of political action and ethical action. Later in *Precarious Life*, Butler notes that there is a difference between a human psyche, and a nation, and yet both, she asserts, can be read as a "subject" (*PL*, 41), and both, the nation and the psychic subject, must begin to recognize themselves within loss. For both the nation and the subject, Butler argues, the capacity to mourn is also the capacity to develop a "keener sense of life [that is needed] in order to oppose violence" (*PL*, xviii-xix). Mourning will become then the central determination of a responsible ethico-politics for both the state and the subject.<sup>59</sup>

The experience of 9/11 is, for Butler, an experience of violation, violence, and grief. This is an experience of loss. While acknowledging the risk of grounding her thought in a "new-humanism," Butler is willing to assert that "despite our differences in location and history . . . it

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<sup>58</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004). Further references to *Precarious Life* will appear in text, indicated by *PL* where necessary.

<sup>59</sup> Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, "Encounters Possible and Impossible: Derrida and Butler on Mourning," [Philosophy Today](#) 50 (2006 Supplement): 144-155.

is possible to appeal to a ‘we,’ for all of us have some notion of what it is to have lost somebody” (*PL*, 20). To speak of the subject is to speak of a being that is vulnerable to loss, and a “keener sense” of life will be to experience this loss in a new way.

Amidst this universal loss, Butler argues, the fact that loss is distributed differently cannot be overlooked (*PL*, 32). Different bodies and different subjects are subjected to different moments of loss, of different moments of violation, and different moments of violence.<sup>60</sup> Even with this, it is not simply, though, that all subjects have some notion of loss. Loss is what constitutes subjects as human subjects. Human subjects are, at a fundamental level, ruptured by but also grounded in loss. The seemingly external and mundane loss that all experience – the loss of a friend, of a loved one, of a family – can be, and often is, a loss that quite literally places one besides oneself (*PL*, 23-24). To be ruptured by loss in this way is to no longer know what or who one is.<sup>61</sup> Loss at this level is not merely, then, external, but is a loss that is internal – a loss of a something that was not known but that is, when, gone, seen to have been a part of the self. Butler is looking, here, for a way of understanding a certain relationality, what she will name an “inevitable interdependency” (*PL*, xii)<sup>62</sup>; a relationality that is experienced retrospectively in the moment of loss. And if this relationality can be understood – or rather, maintained, for the moment of this constitutive loss is the threshold of understanding – a new ethics may be possible, an ethico-politics of relationality.

Relationality is, though, a difficult concept for Butler. As she admits in the opening of *Precarious Life*, she cannot easily think relationality.<sup>63</sup> This, though, seems to be a conceptual

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<sup>60</sup> Youdell, “Subjectivation and performative politics.”

<sup>61</sup> This unknowing has become central to Butler’s more recent work, especially in *Giving an Account of Oneself*.

<sup>62</sup> Theim, *Unbecoming Subjects*, 111.

<sup>63</sup> Elsewhere Butler more clearly articulates her worry with the concept of relationality; it is, she fears, a suturing concept, one which, in its deployment, will dissimulate the rupture of being which is registered in the negativity of



difficulty without content, for as is made clear in *Giving An Account of Oneself*, Butler has always thought a relationality through her Foucaultian reading of psychoanalysis (GAO, 181). Relationality is always, in Butler, the relation of oneself to another through a normative encounter (GAO, 8), an encounter that is an incorporation (GAO, 53; *PLP*, 195). To understand this relationality that relates through mourning and loss it is necessary to return to Foucault, and specifically, the scene of the prison.

As Butler takes up Foucault, subjectivity is to be understood as subjectivation, which denotes both the becoming of the subject, and this becoming as a process of subjection (*PLP*, 83). The movement into (although we will have to question where this is a movement from) subjectivity is always an achievement (although we will also have to question the efficacy of this achievement) and so a production that takes place through and within power. In *Discipline and Punishment*, Foucault investigates the deployment of this power in the prison, wherein the subject produced is the prisoner. As we have already seen, within the space of the prison, the subjectivation of the prisoner takes place primarily through the formation of a body, an imprisoned body. Yet this imprisonment is not only, and not even foundationally, an imprisonment within the physical structure of the prison. Rather, the prisoner is imprisoned by his, or at least a, soul. As Foucault argues: the prisoner “is already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself. A ‘soul’ inhabits him and brings him to existence... The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body.”<sup>64</sup> Power works through the soul, so that, as Butler reads Foucault, “the soul becomes a normative and normalizing ideal according to which the body is trained, shaped, cultivated, and invested; it is a historically specific imaginary ideal under which the body is materialized” (*PLP*,

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mourning and loss. “Besides Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy,” in *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 18.

<sup>64</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 30.

90). With this production of a normalized and coherent body, normalized under the sign of the soul, the prisoner has become a subject.<sup>65</sup>

For Foucault, this soul is also a production of power: the soul is itself an effect of power that becomes externalized as the prison of the body. For Butler, Foucault has developed an account of the soul as the psychic principle of subjectivation, yet this is an account that he cannot elaborate within the terms of his own theoretical position (*PLP*, 86-87). “One cannot,” she argues, “account for subjectivation and becoming the principle of one’s own subjection without recourse to a psychoanalytic account of the formative or generative effects of restriction or prohibition” (*PLP*, 87). With this move to psychoanalysis Butler argues that the production of the soul, now read in the psychoanalytic terms of the psyche, is the effect of a primary restriction, or foreclosure. In a passage that brings together a discussion of Foucault and the exteriorization of the soul, with her earlier work on performativity, Butler states that “[psychoanalysis] argues that what is exteriorized or performed can only be understood by reference to what is barred from performance, what cannot or will not be performed” (*PLP*, 144-145). What is at stake, then, in the formation of the psyche, is the domain of the expressible, of the representable, and this domain can only be understood in relation to a foreclosure that disallows certain performances and representations.<sup>66</sup> Although the subject of this phrase will become difficult, if not impossible, to name, these barred performances and representations, to the extent that they are barred, are lost.

To fully recast this language of the soul into the language of the psyche, the formative moment of the psyche is transformed into an effect of melancholy and mourning.<sup>67</sup> Although Freud himself never settled on the distinction between these two, melancholy and mourning,

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<sup>65</sup> Vicki Kirby, *Judith Butler: Live Theory* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 115-118.

<sup>66</sup> This is also, for Butler, the domain of the political. See “Besides Oneself,” 28.

<sup>67</sup> Maya Lloyd, *Judith Butler: From Norms to Politics* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007), 141-142.

Butler marks the distinction as being between a loss that cannot be known and a loss that can, in some sense, be known (*PL*, 22). Melancholia is the effect of a loss that cannot be known to the extent that the object lost is lost precisely because it cannot be acknowledged, and this lack of acknowledgement will also be an unrepresentability. Melancholy permits “the loss of the object in the external world precisely because it provides a way to preserve the object as part of the ego and, hence, to avert the loss as a complete loss” (*PLP*, 134). Yet it is not that this lost object enters, literally, into the ego, but rather that the ego is itself produced by this loss. This loss, in other words, can only be accepted by a preservation whereby that lost object is preserved in and as the ego. As Butler argues this point, “Giving up the object becomes possible only on the condition of a melancholic internalization or, what might for our purposes turn out to be even more important, a melancholic *incorporation*” (*PLP*, 134). Although this loss is accepted by a melancholic interpretation, it is also, paradoxically refused. The lost object is lost by not being lost.

Here we are at the limits of representation, and the ability to narrate this process.<sup>68</sup> Narration is only possible for an ego, for a psyche, that has already become, that has already arrived at the end of its own history of lost becoming. To be able to represent this loss is to have already lost, and so to have already given up the possibility of acknowledging this object. The point then is not to ask if there is an experience prior to representation, but rather to investigate this effect of representation which is also an effect of a foreclosure that delimits in advance what is representable. To focus on foreclosure, is to focus on what is deemed livable, and this is the beginnings of ethical thought.

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<sup>68</sup> Asher Walden, “Butler on Subjectivity and Authorship: Reflections on Doing Philosophy in the First Person,” *The Pluralist* 4, no. 2 (June 1, 2009): 58.

Within a Lacanian reading of psychoanalysis, this foreclosure operates under the symbolic. Foreclosure already and in advance is a bar on what can be represented under the Law. To be representable is to be able to enter into the symbolic. Yet for Lacan, there is also always a remainder that is produced by this foreclosure. As Butler reads this remainder, “The imaginary signifies the impossibility of the [symbolic] constitution of identity. Identity [and here we might, with much hesitation, speak of subjectivation] can never be fully totalized by the symbolic, for what it fails to order will emerge within the imaginary as a disorder, a site where identity is contested” (*PLP*, 97). It is here, in the domain of the imaginary, that resistance to the symbolic is registered. Although this may seem hopeful, Butler is right to argue that this actually dooms resistance to failure. As we have seen, once resistance is removed from the domain of the symbolic into the imaginary, it can never get back to effect the symbolic. The symbolic, the Law, will always and everywhere remain intact, and so foreclosure will also always and everywhere already be determined by the Law without contest.

This movement through psycho-analysis has been made by Butler to explain the production of the soul in Foucault, to explain the peculiarity of an attachment to subjectivation. This attachment to subjectivation is an attachment to representation, which is also an attachment to social existence. To the extent that the subject is an effect of the soul, which is an effect of foreclosure, which is in the name of the Law and the symbolic, subjectivation is the necessary site of social existence as representable. For Butler, it is impossible, though, to remain within the Lacanian determination of subject formation. Within the Lacanian narrative, Butler argues, resistance is always doomed to failure. Here, a return to Foucault is necessary. For Foucault recasts resistance “as an effect of the very power that it is said to oppose” (*PLP*, 98). On the one hand, this possibility of resistance to the symbolic is opened up by the realization that the

symbolic itself is not an *a priori* Law, but is rather itself constituted by power. Although this move, of figuring no outside to power, can seem to limit and halt all efficacy of resistance, the effect is just the opposite. For if the symbolic is itself an effect of power, resistance to this power is then also a resistance which will register its effects on the symbolic. If we are always already implicated in power in our very standing as subjects, then we also are already in a position to contest power.

This, finally, means that melancholia, although at the limits of representation, is not an *a priori*, uncontestable foreclosure. Rather, this foreclosure can itself be contested. Although the livable will always already be made possible by foreclosure, and will always also be a melancholic life, this melancholia, as already mentioned is never complete. Subjectivation, and therefore also foreclosure, must always be repeated, and it is in this repetition that resistance can be registered as a negotiation of what is a livable life.

It is this negotiation of the livable at the limits of representation that Butler comes to mark as the responsibility of ethics and the practice of politics. This responsibility is the responsibility to mourn, or rather, the demand to be allowed to mourn that which has been foreclosed, and so to acknowledge the melancholy of the self. On the one hand, this mourning will be a willingness to acknowledge the loss that founds the life of any subject. But to acknowledge this loss will be to resist the melancholic foreclosure that has as its effect the being of the subject. It will be to acknowledge what cannot be acknowledged about becoming, which is also to contest the very limits of becoming. On the other hand, though, this mourning, to be ethical and political, must also be to mourn those Others who have already been foreclosed from the living. For it is not merely one's own subjectivation that is at issue here. To make an ethical and political turn is to turn to the Other as one who has already also been constituted by loss, and

who is always already a site of loss (*PL*, 30). To mourn in this sense is, as Butler ends *Precarious Life*, “to interrogate the emergence and vanishing of the human at the limits of what we can know, what we can hear, what we can see, what we can sense” (“*PL*,” 151).

In attempting to think through this formative foreclosure, Butler has already begun within the domain of the human. Quite specifically, within her discussions of melancholy and mourning, and the circulation of power as the circulations of desire, she is already thinking within the domain of the ego, or at least the ego in its becoming stabilization. She is, in other words, concerned with human loves and losses and the circulation of the desires of and for the ego. In this, her analysis of the circulation of power through psychoanalysis already accepts the fundamental gesture of Freudian psycho-analysis: the separation of the self from its oceanic possibility of arising.<sup>69</sup> In *Civilization and Its Discontents* Freud famously begins to think the development of the ego by positing an originary “oceanic feeling.”<sup>70</sup> Freud admits that he has not himself had this feeling, but it has been described to him by his friend. By way of this second hand reporting, Freud describes this oceanic feeling as “a peculiar feeling .... a sensation of ‘eternity,’ a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded – as it were, ‘oceanic.’”<sup>71</sup> Although Freud claims to not want to dismiss this feeling, he also cannot quite accept it, for it is not “easy to deal scientifically with feelings.”<sup>72</sup> If it cannot be simply dismissed or scientifically handled, it can, he assures us, be explained by being explained away. It is explained by recourse to the movement of foreclosure and loss, the foreclosure and loss that are necessary for the ego – the mature ego – to develop.<sup>73</sup> To feel this oceanic feeling is only possible, Freud argues, when the

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<sup>69</sup> Catherine Keller, *From A Broken Web: Separation, Sexism and Self* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 94.

<sup>70</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1961), 11.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> As Keller rightly notes, even Freud acknowledges, even as he disavows his own finding, that the ego is founded on a primary loss and separation from the world, and so is founded on a loss not only of mourning but of ecological

psyche has failed to properly separate itself from the world. Prior to the ideation of the self, prior to any separation from a loved one, a separation that may be foreclosed or renounced, the psyche is first established by separating itself out from its own world of becoming. It is only with this originary separation that we can begin to speak of the movement of the ego at all, and so the foreclosure on this feeling becomes the unacknowledged and unable to be acknowledged condition of the becoming ego.

In beginning with the foreclosure of human desire as a feeling of and in the world, and so the foreclosure of human relationality as arising out of and beyond itself in its total ecological world, Butler herself forecloses from critique the practices of separation from the ecological world of this oceanic feeling through which not only critique but the subject of critique arise. This is, as we have seen, the unacknowledged foreclosure that troubles her analysis of materialization as the movement of power. For Butler's thought begins with an exclusionary separation from the world in order to investigate the foreclosures by which the subject is established, foreclosing on the possibility of feeling a love as a feeling of the world in and as the eros of its own becoming. In already accepting this constitutive foreclosure from which the self arises, she is unable to critically explore the ecological foreclosure of the subjects becoming as a human subject.<sup>74</sup> It is not then, strictly speaking, the focus on the human subject – on the narrowly defined political focus – that troubles Butler's work. As Whitehead himself recognizes, all thought, including critique, begins with a subjective bias that we cannot escape.

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relationality. And yet his own work, unlike many of his feminist followers in their own desire for a returned to mat(tern)iality, is predicated precisely on the desire for the normalization of this ecological loss. See, *From A Broken Web*, 95-100.

<sup>74</sup> This is true even given Butler's desire to rethink the very nature of nature and, specifically, material nature in *Bodies That Matter*. As we have already seen, even in this work Butler's fundamental concern remains *human bodies* that matter. As explored below, Butler comes much closer to opening up this originary foreclosure in her recent turn to the religious as the attempt to think through an originary violence of becoming.

It is rather that her work begins with an ecological rupture that, as condition of her critique, cannot itself be recovered or reflected on.

Is it possible to begin to think subjectivity without this initial foreclosure? Or to think subjectivity within this foreclosure and not with-out it, on the outside, the other side of it? Thinking the subject without an initial foreclosure on the possibility of feeling within a broader sociality, one which pushes beyond the merely human to the ecological, to develop a politics that must itself become within the demands of an eco-logic of necessity?<sup>75</sup> As we have already seen in relation to his determination of power as a becoming materialism, in his insistence that actuality immerses itself, arises out of, ultimately to return to these oceanic depths, Whitehead proposes just such a political ecology of feeling.<sup>76</sup> Yet we must be careful here, for to feel the world is not necessarily nor simply a positivity of total becoming.<sup>77</sup> Whitehead does not propose an absorption into nor a purification in the seas of becoming. Whitehead's is not a New Age utopia. Within the Whiteheadian ecology of feeling the exclusion of feeling as the feeling of exclusion enacted as the decision of becoming, which is itself an incision of actuality by possibility, will always be the necessary constitutive feeling of the exclusion of what was and might have been but was not. As Whitehead argues, "the completion of 'givenness' in actual fact converts the 'not-given' for that fact into 'impossibility' for *that* fact. The individuality of an actual entity involves exclusive limitation" (*PR*, 45). If to become is to feel the world here, now, in this particular way, this feeling is always haunted by the feeling of what was not felt; of what cannot, at this moment, as this occasion, be felt; what is, for this occasion, impossible. It is

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<sup>75</sup> Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences Into Democracy*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

<sup>76</sup> Michael S. Carolan, "An Ecological Politics of Everyday Life: Placing Flesh on Whitehead's Process Philosophy in Search of "Green" Possibilities," *Worldviews: Environment Culture Religion* 12, no.1 (2008): 51-73.

<sup>77</sup> Ernest Wolf-Gazo, "Negation and Contrast: The Origin of Self-Consciousness in Hegel and Whitehead," in *Hegel and Whitehead* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1986), 212.



only through the determination of the impossible that the possible itself can become actual. This is, of course, a dangerous condition. On the one hand, of course, this haunting can itself become the opportunity of possibility for a future occasion, the opening for the impossible to become actual precisely within a politics of possibility. But on the other hand, as we have seen, this impossibility of feeling can become the occasion for a dogmatism of necessity, where impossibility for a particular occasion is transformed into the simply impossible, and the decision of one moment of becoming is enforced for all possible becoming. The task becomes, then, to articulate the conditions for becoming within a world, a becoming that proceeds by both the positivity of feeling a relationality to this very world as the condition of arising, and the negativity through which every decision to become must pass. To articulate the necessity of becoming within this feeling of that which has been absented, foreclosed, as that which will always also remain as the possible within a world of becoming as a constructivist project.

Whitehead begins this articulation of a world of becoming through an ontological leveling, proposing that “‘actual entities’ – also termed ‘actual occasions’ – are the final real things of which the world is made up. There is no going behind actual entities to anything more real.... The final facts are, all alike, actual entities; and these actual entities are drops of experience, complex and interdependent” (*PR*, 18). Within the metaphysical abstraction of *Process and Reality*, Whitehead speculates a univocal ontology of occasions of experience, occasions of feeling, as the final real things of the world. If this is an ontological leveling, it is not, for that, an ontological simplification, as the complexification of Whitehead’s categoreal scheme gives witness with its four kinds of categories, each further differentiated by three notions of ultimacy, eight categories of existence, twenty-seven categories of explanation, and nine categoreal obligations. It is, in other words, many other words, an ontological univocity

that is open to its own continual becoming. As a categoreal scheme of possibility and discovery it is also an ontology as much responsible to ethics as to epistemology.<sup>78</sup>

Responsibility arises within Whitehead's ontology to the extent that it is an ontology of achievement, a constructivism of being as that which is achieved out of the past, as the present, for the future.<sup>79</sup> This constructivism is itself a constructivism of every layer of ontological actuality that is or can be experience. Within the ecological demands of necessity, both the subject, as the political subject, and the subject-superject, as fundamental actuality, are achievements of being. For actual occasions, this is, as Whitehead designates it, the Principle of Process: "That *how* an actual entity *becomes* constitutes *what* that actual entity *is*... Its 'being' is constituted by its 'becoming'" (PR, 23). This is, as we will see in a moment, an anti-ontological achievement of actuality as the fundamental nature of actual occasions, privileging becoming as the fundamental nature of being. It is also, though, when the move is made to explore not simply these fundamental actualities, but the objects of our world – bodies and tables, trees and squirrels – to determine the achievement of the human subject as that which becomes as the structured endurance of occasions as an eventual achievement of becoming (PR, 90ff). The human body is not the materiality of an already achieved singularity, but the event of an order that is achieved as a machine for the intensification of experience (PR, 119),<sup>80</sup> just as the human subject is not the essence of an already given nature, but the achievement of the structured ordering of occasions as that which is both this achieved body and the enduring order

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<sup>78</sup> Jones, *Intensity*, 6, 171-203; Hutchins, "Unconforming Becomings," 128.

<sup>79</sup> As articulated in the eighth Categoreal Obligation, "The Category of Subjective Intensity," this responsibility is not only a responsibility to that which has already been achieved, as the condition of the subject's own becoming, but is also a responsibility to the future, as the future of the subject's own present becoming. See PR, 27.

<sup>80</sup> Michael Halewood, "Butler and Whitehead on the (Social) Body," in *Secrets of Becoming: Negotiating Whitehead, Deleuze, and Butler*, eds. Faber, Roland and Andrea M. Stephenson. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 118.

of personality.<sup>81</sup> There is, then, nothing which is formally or ideally unique to the human being: as with all other spatially and temporally enduring events, the subject is the extended achievement of a particular social becoming, always necessarily achieving its becoming within an ecological world of experience. This is, for Whitehead, in a way that Butler will certainly acknowledge, to demand a recognition of the porous vulnerability of the human body and the human subject.<sup>82</sup> If the human subject arises within and from an ecological relationality, this arising is always both contingent and tenuous.

Prior to this achievement of the human subject, although as we will see, this temporality is itself difficult to maintain, is the actual occasion, the occasional subject-superject of becoming. For Whitehead, this occasion of actuality is an occasion of feeling, a feeling of feelings. The subject is, Whitehead argues, “the entity constituted by the process of feeling... the unity emergent from its own feeling” (*PR*, 88). The occasion of actuality is an occasion of feeling, a convergence of feelings as felt in the unity of a becoming subject-superject. Within this process of feeling, the subject-superject is not simply the subject which feels, but is rather constituted as the feelings being felt. In a strict sense, the occasion is the feelings of a world (*PR*, 221).<sup>83</sup>

Again within the limitative language of a given grammar, Whitehead is attempting to articulate here the becoming of an occasion as that which arises out of a world as the production of the world of its arising.<sup>84</sup> On the one hand, the occasion is the demarcation of a singular intensive feeling of the world. This demarcation occurs through what Whitehead designates as ‘concrescence,’ the “process in which the universe of many things acquires an individual unity in

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<sup>81</sup> Hutchins, “Unconforming Becomings,” 117.

<sup>82</sup> See especially, Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*. See also Halewood, “Butler and Whitehead on the (Social) Body,” and Luke B. Higgins, “Becoming Multiplicity: Staying in the Middle of Whitehead’s and Deleuze-Guattari’s Philosophies of Life,” in *Secrets of Becoming: Negotiating Whitehead, Deleuze, and Butler*, eds. Faber, Roland and Andrea M. Stephenson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 149.

<sup>83</sup> Higgins, “Becoming Multiplicity,” 148.

<sup>84</sup> Jones, *Intensity*, 26.

a determinate relegation of each item of the ‘many’ to its subordination in the constitution of the novel ‘one’” (*PR*, 211). The acquiring of individuality is achieved, Whitehead speculates, as the intensive unification of the felt world as a particular moment and a particular place, or rather, a particularization of time and space.

This occurs, Whitehead continues to speculate, as the becoming of three stages of feeling: first, there is what is designated as a conformal stage of physical feeling, in which the becoming occasion feels the world conformally, reproducing as repetition that which has been given to the occasion (*PR*, 245).<sup>85</sup> This is, as we have seen, the stage of physical feelings, whereby the actual world as that from which the novel occasion arises becomes the constitutive internal condition of the new occasion.<sup>86</sup> Second, there arises a stage of conceptual feeling, through which an evaluative subjectivity feels with the particularity of its own aim and desire.<sup>87</sup> Finally, there is a stage of comparative feeling, in which the feelings which are becoming as the novel occasion are felt in their contrasted and complimentary multiplicity to achieve a single intensive feeling of satisfaction (*PR*, 266). This is to arrive, again, at the determination of the concreting occasion as “the subject-superject [that] is the purpose originating the feelings. The feelings are inseparable from the end at which they aim; and this end is the feeler. The feelings aim at the feeler, as their final cause. The feelings are what they are in order that their subject may be what it is” (*PR*, 222). The becoming one that is the actual occasion is the becoming of the teleological aim at the occasion becoming itself.

If this is the analytic of occasions that Whitehead presents, it is also, Whitehead acknowledges, simply an analytic, one which is already too straight, too linear, too given over to a subject-predicate grammar of substance. First, Whitehead recognizes, the given world is never

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>86</sup> Nancy Frankenberry, “The power of the past,” *Process Studies* 13, no. 2 (Summer 1983): 138.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

simply given. Rather, it's very givenness is a process, a constructive achievement of perspective. On the one hand, as we already seen, the intensity at which an occasion is aimed is always beyond itself. All occasions, and now we are concerned with past occasions, are productions of an ecstatic intensity, which are hurtled forward into a becoming world.<sup>88</sup> This then means that the novel occasion is the recipient of these occasions' ecstasis. In *Adventures of Ideas* Whitehead goes so far as to define an object precisely as the which is given, but only and precisely as that which is given to be experienced. 'Object' defines not, then, a class of being, to be opposed to 'subject,' but rather designates the temporality and positionality of antecedence in a relation (*AI*, 178). The relation that is this occasion of experience is itself an active relation, one whose basic fact is "the rise of an affective tone originating from things whose relevance is given" (*AI*, 176).<sup>89</sup> In the relation by which an entity becomes an object of experience, the object is neither passive nor a simple object of knowledge. It is, rather, an object of concern, an object felt as that which must matter in the relation of the becoming occasion. In this relation the becoming occasion is provoked into this concern, into this feeling, so that the ecstatic being of the past occasion, now as object to the subject of experience, is a provocation into concern.

On the other hand, and at the same time, the novel occasion of becoming takes up this ecstatic world precisely and only as its own world. If the actual world out of which the occasion arises is itself the collection of entities that are antecedent to the novel occasion, provoking into the novel occasion an affective tone, the novel occasion is not, for that, thoroughly determined by the past. The actual past is, in other words, determined for the occasion by the occasion.

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<sup>88</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1933; New York: The Free Press, 1967), 177. Further references to *Adventures of Ideas* will appear in text, indicated by *AI* where necessary. Michael Halewood, "On Deleuze and Whitehead: The Process of Materiality," *Configurations* 12, no.1 (Winter, 2005): 62.

<sup>89</sup> On the occasion of her recent return to Whitehead's thought, Butler took up an extended rumination on this passage from *Adventures of Ideas*, puzzling over the temporality, causality and activity of the occasion of experience.

“Each actual occasion,” Whitehead argues, “defines its own actual world from which it originates. No two occasions can have identical actual worlds” (*PR*, 210). The ecstatic past, hurtling to the new occasion, is, in a rather strict sense, over-whelming, threatening to overwhelm the occasion with concern.<sup>90</sup> Not all provocations can be felt, some must be resisted by and as the finitude of the occasion.<sup>91</sup> One of the ways in which Whitehead attempts to understand this relation between what is given and what is determined as given is through the decision by which the multiplicity of the initial data of an occasion becomes the objective data of that occasion (*PR*, 221). This transformation of initial data into objective data is made possible, Whitehead argues, by elimination, “effected by the subjective form” of the occasion (*PR*, 221). In order to articulate this ‘elimination’ Whitehead distinguishes between feelings, as positive prehensions of the world, and negative prehensions, which are not feelings, even if they are felt (*PR*, 41). A negative prehension is, Whitehead argues, “the definite exclusion of [an] item from positive contribution to the subject’s own real internal constitution.” Yet, he continues, a negative prehension still “expresses a bond” (*PR*, 41). A negative prehension is, then, a feeling of absence more than it is the absence of feeling. And this feeling of absence is itself doubled as a feeling without content, a subjective form without data, and as a feeling of that which has been eliminated.<sup>92</sup>

To feel the world out of which and as the moment of the occasion of feeling is not simply to be as provoked by and into being by the past. It is to be provoked through and as the eliminative decision of negativity, a decision that will always haunt the occasion as the feeling of what has been absented. The givenness of the world as the condition of the occasion only arises

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<sup>90</sup> Joseph A. Bracken, “Authentic subjectivity and genuine objectivity,” *Horizons* 11, no. 2 (Fall 1984): 290-303.

<sup>91</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), 107. Further references to *Modes of Thought* will appear in text, indicated by *MT* where necessary.

<sup>92</sup> William A. Christian, *An Interpretation of Whitehead’s Metaphysics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), 26.

through decision, and decision as exclusion (*PR*, 43).<sup>93</sup> This exclusion is, though, never complete or final. The satisfaction which marks the completed unity of the occasion is and never achieves a simplicity of being. The multiplicity from which the occasion arises remains as the felt intensive unity of the occasion, an intensive unity that contains within itself, as Walt Whitman will famously remark, multitudes. The decision to become is the decision to feel this multiplicity as the occasion of its own becoming. In this sense decision is, for Whitehead, the very determination of actuality (*PR*, 43). To be is to become as the decision which cuts a space and time for oneself in the world, a world of ecstatic provocation.

Yet to speak of decision in this way is not to reinstall a subject as the essence or underlying substance preceding feeling. Just as there is for Butler no doer behind the deed, there is, for Whitehead, no feeler behind the feeling. Rather, “the word ‘subject’ means the entity constituted by the process of feeling, and including this process. The feeler is the unity emergent from its own feelings...” (*PR*, 88). The subject, the occasion as the feeler of the world, does not precede the feelings of its becoming.<sup>94</sup> Rather, the occasion becomes all-at-once or not-at-all as the durational intensity of an occasion.<sup>95</sup> The occasion is, in this sense, the collapsed moment of performativity where the subject becomes in and as the decisional atomicity of an intensive occasion of feeling. An intensity that contains within itself the entire ecological world of its becoming, felt as that which has provoked it into its own becoming, a becoming that is its own decision to be a multitude that it can never fully contain.

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<sup>93</sup> Roland Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 133.

<sup>94</sup> Jones, *Intensity*, 33.

<sup>95</sup> Higgins, “Becoming Multiplicity,” 148.

#### 4. Death and satisfaction; or the order of law

If power becomes a materialization, a materialization of becoming, and this becoming is always a becoming within a relationality, we are already within the realm of attempting to determine the becoming of possibility itself as a materialization. If power is the movement of materialism, possibility is its own production. We have already seen that for both Butler and Whitehead one realm of possibility opens within the limits and failures of language and grammar. Yet this opening within language and grammar is not simply an epistemic opening, concerned with that which can be known through representation. For Butler, as we have seen, the opening at the limit of grammar is itself an opening into and onto that which is allowed to appear. For Whitehead, too, there is a reciprocal relation between a constructivist practice of philosophy and a constructivist ontology of actuality in which all becoming is the becoming of possibility. For both Butler and Whitehead, though, the limits and failures of language and grammar are not the only openings to the possible. For both possibility arises within the limit of death, both the death of the subject and the death of God.

It is possible to begin exploring the relation between death and possibility by turning to the series of lectures given by Butler published as *Antigone's Claim*. In these lectures, Butler attempts, as she states it, to rethink Antigone, and the legacy of Antigone, as “a figure for politics [that] points somewhere else, not to politics as a question of representation but to that political possibility that emerges when the limits to representation and representability are exposed.”<sup>96</sup> Although her primary interest in this reading of Antigone is to question the ways in which the norms of kinship, and particularly the incest taboo, function in the stabilizing of a certain politics, from her reading of Antigone we can see that three grounds of possibility are being

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<sup>96</sup> Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*, The Welleck Library Lectures (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 2. Further references to *Antigone's Claim* will appear in text, indicated by AC where necessary.



proposed: the first, possibilities following from the failure of law in normalizing its demands; the second, possibilities that arise where two or more discourses intersect in their productions of recognition; third, possibilities that arise from the intersection of two times: the universalized time of the law, and the particular times of its instantiation.

For many interpreters, and for Butler this means specifically Hegel and Lacan, Antigone's death, a death that is mandated by her disobedience of the edict of Creon, marks the transition to and establishment of a certain social being: Being determined by the political, as that which supersedes kinship. Here, Antigone, as representative of kinship, is bound to kinship, bound to the order of kinship, and it is this binding that compels her to bury her brother – Polyneices, and not any other “brothers” she may have – in defiance of the order of Creon, the representation of the state, and so the order of the state. Much too simply, the failure of her resistance is the failure of kinship before the law of the state, and so her death is also the death of kinship.

Yet, as Butler notes, Antigone's life and death cannot be so clearly demarcated. Her life, especially in the final moments of defiance, is less than a clear representation of the norms she is supposed to represent; she is, in her defiance, barely a proper representation of the subject of kinship. It is less than clear that Antigone is properly following the norms of kinship in burying her one brother at the seeming expense of her other kin relations; what of her duties to her sister, to her as yet not born children, to Creon, who is still her kin? Do these others, Butler wants to ask, not also impinge on the kin duties of Antigone? Which is to ask: from a position within kinship, can Antigone's insistence on burying her one brother appear as anything less than a certain promiscuity, a certain unjustifiable attachment to Polyneices? And what are we to make of Antigone's position within kinship as the daughter of incest, as a daughter to one's brother, a

brother to one's uncle? And what of those often repeated, apparently kin-determined, announcements of her own manliness, as the caretaker of her father? "Though entangled in the terms of kinship," Butler argues,

[Antigone] is at the same time outside those norms. Her crime [and we need to add 'her death'] is confounded by the fact that the kinship line from which she descends, and which she transmits, is derived from a paternal position that is already confounded by the manifestly incestuous act that is the condition of her own existence, which makes her brother her father, which begins a narrative in which she occupies, linguistically, every kin position *except* 'mother' and occupies them at the expense of the coherence of kinship... (AC, 72).

If Antigone is to represent kinship, and to be the representative subject of and within kinship, it is difficult to see how she represents or enacts any stable kinship.<sup>97</sup>

It is this stability that is of the greatest importance as the foundation of representation. Without the time to risk rehearsing Butler's argument, developed in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter* specifically, representation, as the mark of a certain metaphysic, demands that one be intelligible within a particular system according to norms established by that system. These systems, Butler argues, are always historically and socially constituted, so that they enact as their historical instantiation the demand that one *be* according to that which can be represented. Representation, for Butler, is not so much a matter of re-presenting that which is given, but is rather the determination of things, subjects, as representable, according to the historical and social norms of that system. Only that which can be represented can be, in a quite strict sense. To the extent that Being is, or beings are, posited as the foundation of representation, the act of determining objects as representable is subsumed into an ontology that occludes its own productivity, the naturalization, Butler would say, of historical norms. This act of representation

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<sup>97</sup> Although Kristen Campbell is correct in noting the ways in which Antigone undoes any stable conception of kinship, she misreads Butler in proposing an opposition between a political Antigone who undoes kinship and a passive Antigone who is undone by kinship. Kristen Campbell, "The Politics of Kinship," *Economy and Society* 31, no.4 (Nov. 2002): 649.

further demands a certain stability for its operation: only that which can be stably represented can be represented at all. Being then becomes measured as a universal fixity. For Antigone to be, then, means that she is representable within a system that has already determined the terms of being as representability; to be, she must occupy one of the normalized and representable positions within kinship: daughter, sister, mother. The inability to occupy any one of these positions properly renders Antigone unrepresentable, and so also something less than a being. It is in this way, for Butler, that Antigone “draws into crisis ... the representative function itself, the very horizon of intelligibility in which she operates and according to which she remains somewhat unthinkable” (AC, 22). Unthinkable precisely within the terms of kinship. Yet it is precisely these terms that must remain stable, and within which Antigone must stably remain, for her to be representable, or rather, for her to be. Butler’s critique, then, is something less than a theory of the subject, for it is rather, a critique of representation that does not fully undo representation itself.

Antigone’s instability, though, is not only a matter of her familial relations, or deformations. “Antigone is introduced to us,” Butler reminds us, “by the act by which she defies Creon’s sovereignty, contesting the power of his edict.... [S]he answers a question that is posed to her from another authority, and thus she concedes the authority that this other has over her.... She asserts herself through appropriating the voice of the other, the one to whom she is opposed” (AC, 8, 11). Creon’s edict is announced to those who are his political subjects, to those who are political subjects. The edict assumes the already political status of those who it is announced to. Yet matters are not so simple. First, of course, the edict must be announced, a task that is only forcefully assigned. Secondly, it appears that not all of Creon’s political subjects properly hear his word; in the opening moments of *Antigone*, Ismene seems to have not heard the edict. Is this

a first possibility that a certain kinship remains outside the political? Would it then be possible for Antigone to claim a certain ignorance, a certain unintelligibility of the edict, where we may not be sure where this unintelligibility resides? Maybe, but this is not what happens. Rather, Antigone answers this call of the edict, turns toward the call, in a moment of strict Althusserian interpolation. In turning to the edict, in accepting its call as applicable to her, Antigone accepts the position of being subject to the edict, a subject of the edict, a political subject.<sup>98</sup> Her subsequent denial of the authority of the edict rests on the already accepted authority of the edict. To the extent that she will come to contest the edict, burying her brother in the name of another law (a law which as we have already seen it is difficult for Antigone to claim) this contestation already takes place within the terms of the political. “What this suggests,” for Butler, “is that [Antigone] cannot make her claim outside the language of the state” (AC, 28). To too quickly bring this back into the previous discussion of representation, for Antigone to represent kinship she must also represent the state. In order for her to intelligibly act within kinship, she must also intelligibly act within the political. In order for her to be within kinship she must also be within the state.<sup>99</sup> Yet the edict that Creon announces precludes this possibility: Antigone must be one or the other; she cannot be both kin and patriot. As Butler argues, “she is precisely the one with no place who nevertheless seeks to claim one...” (AC, 78). She finds herself positioned at the intersection of two incompatible discourses, discourses that require not only their mutual incompatibility, but also their mutual stability, and so a certain compatibility. The political demands the stability of kinship as that which can be overcome by the political. Kinship then

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<sup>98</sup> Elena Loizidou, *Judith Butler: Ethics, Law, Politics*, Nomikoi Critical Legal Thinkers (New York: Routledge, 2007), 84.

<sup>99</sup> Maria Cimitile, “Review: *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*,” *Hypatia* 18, no.3 (Summer2003): 222.

becomes reified as that which is overcome, and in this overcoming cannot be challenged. This is the Lacanian development of the symbolic.

To step back for a moment, then, we can see that for Butler, these first two moments of possibility arise from certain instabilities: first, an instability that arises within specific discourses, and, second, an instability that arises from the intersection of discourses. As to the former, Antigone comes to epitomize the inability of any normativity to nominalize itself such that it can properly represent with the universality that is required for representation. Even in her criminality, Butler argues, Antigone demonstrates the singularity of the law in and through its applications. As Butler argues, the

law appears to have but one instance of application. Her brother is, in her view, not reproducible, but this means that the conditions under which the law [of kinship] becomes applicable are not reproducible. This is a law of the instant and, hence, a law with no generality and no transposability, one mired in the very circumstances to which it is applied, a law formulated precisely through the singular instance of its application and, therefore, no law at all in any ordinary, generalizable sense (AC, 10).

To the extent that any law must particularize itself in its application, it must also, to the same extent and in the same moment, fail precisely as universalizable law.<sup>100</sup> It is in this failure of the law that a certain possibility arises: the possibility of a performative misapplication of the law.

As to the latter, possibility seems to arise for Butler at the intersection of various discourses, various laws. Life is lived amidst a number of often competing laws, competing discursive systems, with various demands and norms being enacted. It is in this confrontation that possibility for new experiences arises. The demands of one law may be abandoned, partially or fully, in the name of another law, so that one can become what one was not. Yet here, as

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<sup>100</sup> Adrian Johnston, "The Exception and the Rule," *Continental Philosophy Review* 35, no. 4 (December, 2002): 426.

Antigone shows for Butler, this movement is never pure. Antigone finds herself within two intersecting discourses, and she does not move exclusively between the two. She does not move from a position of pure kin to pure political subject as she moves between two laws, two discourses. Rather, her being always appears as a deformity. With this, Antigone's "situation can be understood, but only with a certain amount of horror" (AC, 57). Antigone, in other words, misrepresents both kinship and the political, and so appears as the misrepresented, the deformed. Antigone does not appear within an empty space between discourses that can be willfully or intentionally traversed by a subject, but rather as the production of monstrous subjectivities at the collision of discourses. She appears, as do all subjects, as and at the site of two or more conflictual demands that become reconciled, though possibly unrecognizably, in a moment of appearance, beautiful becoming or monstrously deformed.

As can be seen from this, the openings of possibility are founded on the disjunct and subsequent collision between quasi-ontological discourses of becoming. Not just discourses, these domains are registered for Butler as two times: the universal times of law – where here, again, law is shorthand for those various forms of normativity -, and the mundane times of the law's application. As we have already seen, for Butler, the law as such, and this is one of the broadest generalization Butler allows, can only exist as a certain abstraction, precisely to the extent that it must be applicable to all who fall within its range. This is true of Butler's work not only for the instance of Creon's law in *Antigone*, but of law in general, of norms, of social structures. These are registered not only as spatially abstracted – the law must be applicable in any place, they are also temporally abstracted – the law must be applicable at any time. And yet as we have seen Butler argue, laws only function to the extent that they are applied in particular instances, at particular moments, in certain mundane times. The time of the law is not the time

of life; and although the law will come to structure time, this structuring is never complete nor total. There will also be a remainder of life that cannot be accounted for. It is in this space of the remainder that possibility resides.

Antigone, of course, is not a figure of possibility without difficulty: her life ends in death, a fairly difficult death at that. She is fated, it would seem, to a certain punishment, banished to a prison that is her tomb, wherein she takes her own life.<sup>101</sup> Possibility, as that which resides at the limit of representation, comes with a certain risk: the risk of death. Although Antigone comes to occupy new subject positions, these positions are ultimately, and less, unlivable. Of course Antigone's life ends, and to say anything beyond this may be overdramatic; even if we consider the moment of this death, it is still a death that is transferable, at least in a general way. Yet Butler wants to insist that we look more closely at Antigone's death and see that it is, in some ways, quite exceptional. Where, for example, do we mark her death: at her suicide? At her burial, which of course takes place before her death? At the moment she buries her brother, which will lead to her death? In her being cursed by Oedipus? Or in her being born, and placed under the curse of Oedipus? It is, as Butler argues, that Antigone's "fate is not to have a life to live, to be condemned to death prior to any possibility of life. This raises the question of how it is that kinship secures the conditions of intelligibility by which life becomes livable, by which life also becomes condemned and foreclosed. Antigone's death is always doubled throughout the play: she claims that she has not lived, that she has not loved, and that she has not borne children, and so that she has been under the curse that Oedipus laid upon his children, 'serving death' for the length of her life. Thus death signifies the unlived life, and so as she approaches the living tomb that Creon has arranged for her, she meets a fate that has been hers all along" (AC, 23). This doubling of death designates a prior death, prior to a final death, a

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<sup>101</sup> Lloyd, *Judith Butler*, 95.

death that is experienced in life, and so is a living death. It is the death experienced by an unrepresentable life, by a life that is unintelligible. To the extent that to be is to be representable, any life that moves at the edges of representation will be something less than being. Every possibility risks a living death, a suffering of non-being in life that is fore-ordained by the conditions which provide that very possibility.

This is, as Whitehead recognizes, the necessity of all actuality that is not captured within the stasis of being.<sup>102</sup> “[The] doctrine of organism,” he argues, “is the attempt to describe the world as a process of generation of individual actual entities, each with its own absolute self-attainment. This concrete finality of the individual is nothing else than a decision referent beyond itself. The ‘perpetual perishing’ of individual absoluteness is thus foredoomed” (*PR*, 60). A certain death is not simply a risk, but is the metaphysical necessity of any reiterative becoming; whether that be the iteration of performativity, or the iteration of concrescence.

As we have seen, within his own metaphysical abstraction, Whitehead conceptualizes this death within and through the aid of the innocuous term “satisfaction”: “The process of concrescence,” Whitehead argues, “terminates with the attainment of a fully *determinate* ‘satisfaction’; and the creativity thereby passes over into the ‘given’ primary phase for the concrescence of other actual entities. This transcendence is thereby established when there is attainment of *determinate* ‘satisfaction’ completing the antecedent entity. Completion is the perishing of immediacy: ‘It never really is’” (*PR*, 85). ‘Satisfaction’ is that which marks the completion of an actual occasion, its final attainment. Yet if ‘satisfaction’ is a finality, a completion, it is a closure that is never experienced by the experiencing subject, for this, as Whitehead argues, “would [then] be a component in the process, and would thereby alter the

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<sup>102</sup> Jones, *Intensity*, 98.



satisfaction” (*PR*, 85). With this final ontological unfinalizability, ‘satisfaction’ becomes a marker, but a rather fluid, unstable, marker.<sup>103</sup>

Given that, and as that which is to be given, satisfaction, as completion, is measured, by Whitehead, as intensity. In chapter three of the second part of *Process and Reality*, Whitehead posits four grounds of ‘order,’ the second of which is that the ‘end,’ as a final attainment of an actual occasion, is “concerned with the gradations of intensity in the satisfactions of actual entities” (*PR*, 83). To state it too quickly, ‘satisfaction’ is the attainment of a coordinated unity,<sup>104</sup> whereby the given, with its elements of order and disorder, is felt as a new ordered feeling of contrasting feelings: “The heightening of intensity arises from order such that the multiplicity of components ... can enter explicit feeling as *contrasts*, and are not dismissed into negative prehensions as *incompatibilities*” (*PR*, 83). Satisfaction is the final phase and completion of concrescence, that process whereby the given world is productive of a succession of feelings, which are inclusively ordered as contrasts, or exclusively ordered as incompatibilities. This order, the order of satisfaction as the order of feeling, is measured by its production of intensity. ‘Satisfaction’ marks the completion of this process, which is the production of a final feeler, the subject completed, in Whitehead’s language as a subject-superject. With this, the subject loses its immediacy of feeling, is completed, suffers a certain perishing, and is objectified, becoming a part of the given world for a new arising. With this, ‘satisfaction’ is, although the conjunction of completion and death, for the scientifically minded metaphysician, something less than a mournful living death.

One of the immediate consequences of Whitehead’s insistence on the ontological principle, and his resistance to the reification of norms, is that his concern lies in ‘givenness,’

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<sup>103</sup> Jones, *Intensity*, 23.

<sup>104</sup> Christian, *An Interpretation of Whitehead’s Metaphysics*, 23.

and not representation. So chapter three begins with the announcement that “For the organic doctrine the problem of order assumes primary importance. No actual entity can rise beyond what the actual world as a datum from its standpoint –its actual world – allows it to be. Each such datum arises from a primary phase of the concrescence of objectifications which are in some respects settled: the basis of its experience is ‘given’” (*PR*, 83). If the problem of order is of primary importance for Whitehead, it is so only as the order, or ordering, of what is given. As such, it is the order of the actual world as it is given to experience, experience out of which a new actuality will arise.<sup>105</sup> It is the order of the world for an actual occasion.<sup>106</sup>

Whitehead quickly argues that order, although of primary concern, is not totalizing, or totalized. “The correlative of order is disorder” he argues, and “[a]part from it, ‘order’ must be a synonym for ‘givenness’...” (*PR*, 83). This correlation, as difference, determines the meaning of order, but also, precisely as a correlation determines both order and disorder as given.<sup>107</sup> Disorder is less a remainder to be accounted for than an ontologically given dimension of that which is given. Or rather, disorder is not that which will arise as the unaccounted for in the coming to be of an actual occasion, but is rather constitutive of the actual occasion in its coming to be.<sup>108</sup> The instability that a possibly chaotic disorder engenders will always be a constitutive element of an actual occasion.

Although order is, in one sense, a “generic term” (*PR*, 83), a condition of all becoming, it is also always already particularized in relation to a given actual occasion, and so is non-

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<sup>105</sup> James Luther Adams, “The Lure of Persuasion: Some Themes from Whitehead,” in *Process Philosophy and Social Thought*, eds. John B. Cobb, Jr., and W. Widdick Schroeder (Chicago: Center for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1981), 123.

<sup>106</sup> Daryl H. Rice, “Critical Individualism: Whitehead’s Metaphysics and Critique of Liberalism,” *Journal of Value Inquiry* 23, no.2 (June 1989): 88.

<sup>107</sup> Jones, *Intensity*, 20.

<sup>108</sup> This interplay between order and chaos has been explored as the possibility of all becoming by Catherine Keller in *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (New York: Routledge, 2003). See especially Part IV: *Creatio ex profundis*.

totalizing in a second sense. As Whitehead argues, “There is not just one ‘ideal’ order which all actual entities should attain and fail to attain. In each case there is an ideal peculiar to each actual entity.... Thus the notion of ‘order’ is bound up with the notion of an actual entity as involving the attainment which is a specific satisfaction. This satisfaction is the attainment of something individual to the entity in question” (*PR*, 84). If it is possible, as Whitehead later indicates, to read order as a rendering of social law, the law is always already determined in relation to the particularity of actualities. Radicalizing the ontological principle, the law becomes the condition for the becoming of an actual occasion only to the extent that the law has already become particularized for that occasion.<sup>109</sup> As we have already seen, the nature of law, then, is to not only particularize, but to already be particularized.

To the extent that this particularization is “bound” to “a specific satisfaction,” it is also bound to that which arises as a novelty. This is to render as a reciprocal determination what elsewhere Whitehead designates as the “ultimate matter of fact”: “The many become one and are increased by one” (*PR*, 21). Or, in a different context but now again, “No actual entity can rise beyond what the actual world as a datum from its standpoint – *its* actual world – allows it to be” (*PR*, 83). Order and novelty are reciprocal determinants, giving rise to each other.<sup>110</sup>

Here, we begin to see one ground of possibility within Whitehead’s system. Although the actual world is given, and given in a certain order, this order is already determined by the novelty of the arising occasion. In one sense, then, the determinant given world is really quite indeterminant. “The complexity of nature is inexhaustible,” Whitehead argues (*PR*, 106). That which is given is inexhaustible, unable to be exhausted, unable to be drained of its movement into novelty, unable to be lethargically contained. If it is here not precisely disorder out of which

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<sup>109</sup> Faber, *God as Poet of the World*, 89.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

possibility arises, it is the fact that the given is always given anew, that a new given is always given, and that this newness resides precisely in the re-structuring of order, the re-ordering of what is given. Order is incapable of finally, for once and for one, determining a new occasion; order is always already being determined for this new, in a never ending process of creative advance.

In the second section of “The Order of Nature,” Whitehead begins to introduce a number of further conceptualizations of order. The first is that of a ‘society.’ Although Whitehead goes on to offer a number of specifications of societies, here, I want simplify a bit, treating societies in a general sense that includes within it these further specifications, so that a society, as this will be discussed in what follows, refers to a variety of societies, from the society that constitutes the human, to the society as we more general understand this as the social order.

Now “[t]he point of a society,” Whitehead argues, “is that it is self-sustaining; in other words, that it is its own reason... The members of the society are alike . . . by reason of their common character, they impose on other members of the society the conditions which lead to that likeness” (*PR*, 89). A society is marked by a certain likeness of its members, an individual likeness, a likeness that is sustained, or at least sustainable.<sup>111</sup> This likeness is sustained through a doubled imposition: the inheritance of “a certain element of ‘form’”; and the “reproduction” of satisfactions as the effect of this inheritance (*PR*, 89). As has already been mentioned, this imposition is abstracted as the law of a society, as “the product of the defining characteristic of that society... [I]n a society, the members can only exist by reason of the laws which dominate the society, and the laws only come into being by reason of the analogous characters of the members of the society” (*PR*, 90-91). In a society, the absolute novelty of an occasion is mitigated by the imposition of the law of that society. The law, then, while still functioning as

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<sup>111</sup> Jones, *Intensity*, 108.

the condition for the arising of the occasion, also now acts as a certain limitation to that arising.<sup>112</sup> Although not an absolute foreclosure on creativity – what would be for Whitehead a metaphysical impossibility – the law does function so as to mitigate novelty in the service of the sustainability of the society.

Before moving on to an exploration of this interplay between novelty and sustainability, it is necessary to note that for Whitehead, to speak of a society, in the singular, is quite misleading. Here, Whitehead announces a principle, such that “every society requires a social background, of which it is itself a part. In reference to any given society the world of actual entities is to be conceived as forming a background in layers of social order, the defining characteristics becoming wider and more general as we widen the background” (*PR*, 90). Societies are delimited as societies overlain and embedded within societies, within still larger societies, within still larger societies. On this configuration of societies, there is less a clash of societies, or an intersection of orders, than a mutually conditioned and conditioning layering. Each embedded society conforms, in receding generality, to the societies within which it finds itself. This conformation is mediated by the abstractness, or distance, separating societies, so that the order of distant society may only appear, to another society, as a certain disorder. One may wonder if, if this logic is followed to its extreme, there ever is disorder in the world? In this case, it would be necessary to reemphasize the extent to which disorder is itself a perspectival ordering, a ordering that only is felt, by a particular society, or by the members of a particular society, as a disorder. So it is that the determination of disorder is, quite strictly, a determination, and not a necessity, a determination abstracted from the previous determination of relevance. The foreclosure of order as disorder is a function of social order itself, operating in advance to determine what will be felt as a clash, as disorder, as impossibility, as irrelevant.

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<sup>112</sup> Hutchins, “Unconforming Becomings,” 124.

As we have already seen, this determination of order and disorder is, for Whitehead, a function of stability, the means for the stabilization of a society. A society is stabilized to the extent that the determination of order and disorder, such as to be amenable to the reproduction and continued existence of that society, is itself reproducible, and so impossible on the members of that society.<sup>113</sup> The extent to which a society is able to so maintain its own order within a certain environment Whitehead designates as its degree of “specialization” (*PR*, 100). Given this, a certain balance must be achieved for every society: on the one hand, a society must attain a certain level of specialization so as to maintain a certain level of intensity in satisfaction (the measure, as we saw above, of the success of a society), while at the same time, being unspecialized enough to adjust to the ever and ongoing changes of the societies within which that particular finds itself. “The problem of Nature,” Whitehead argues, “is the production of societies which are ‘structured’ with a high ‘complexity,’ and which are at the same time ‘unspecialized.’ In this way, intensity is mated with survival” (*PR*, 101). Which is to say, in another way, that there cannot be one ideal order for any given society. The imposition of one ideal order will necessarily, for Whitehead, eventuate in that society’s instability. The instability of a society, then, follows not from the failure to impose or follow a particular law, but rather from the over intensive imposition of a singular law, or order.<sup>114</sup> Societies that do not allow for a certain flexibility of normativity will necessarily produce instability. The circuitry of instability, then, is founded not on a failure to impose the law, but rather on the overzealous imposition of a singular ideal law.

Societies must, then, maintain a certain balance in being open to a fluctuating given, while retaining a sufficient degree of exclusion to maintain its own order. Whitehead posits that

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<sup>113</sup> Roland Faber, “Cultural Symbolizations of a Sustainable Future,” in *New Directions in Sustainable Design*, eds. Adrian Parr and Michael Zaretsky (New York: Routledge, 2011), 242-255.

<sup>114</sup> A.H. Johnson, *Whitehead’s Philosophy of Civilization* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1962), 96.

societies achieve such a balance in two ways: either by, 1) “blocking out unwelcome detail” by abstractively objectifying the given into a certain ideal generality (*PR*, 101), or by 2) by “appetition,” or, in other words, the development of novelty (*PR*, 102). Societies that follow the first path Whitehead deems as a low grade (*PR*, 102) of society, while those that follow the second path are deemed to be living (*PR*, 102). “The primary meaning of life,” for Whitehead, “is the origination of conceptual novelty – novelty of appetition” (*PR*, 102). These living societies become Whitehead’s concern in the remainder of the chapter.

This novelty, this living, is always open to a certain pathologization by the society in question. For novelty, as the creation of a new feeling, as an acceptance of the experience of that which is new, may, as Butler argues, be the introduction of instability into society. Instability seems to threaten societies from all around. And it is the introduction of this instability as the introduction of novelty that Whitehead recognizes as the pathologization of life, of the determination of a certain novelty as unacceptable by that society. And yet, to the extent that this pathologization is successful, it may lead to the further decay and instability of the society. For pathologization, as the foreclosure on the possibility of novel experience, is always justified and is the means by which order is imposed. Novelty then, brings with it the risk of exclusion, the risk of eliciting the imposition of law, as the means to deny the possibility of that novelty by its pathologization. So it is that novelty is not only the possibility of new experience, of new subject positions, but also the possibility of the circuitry of the imposition of the law. The balance of novelty and stability can quickly devolve into the mutual antagonism of the law and freedom. “Thus life turns back into society: it binds originality within bounds” (*PR*, 107). And yet “Life is a bid freedom,” Whitehead exclaims, a bid that is often forcefully suppressed.

All of this must, finally, be brought back to the Whiteheadian context, one which is figured by societies composed of mutually influencing members, embedded and in interaction with other societies. It is in this interaction between societies that the bid for freedom takes place. For it is the freedom to interact by incorporation, by feeling, by experiencing in a new way this interaction, rather than by rejection, by elimination. Yet the flip side of this freedom, this conceptual novelty, this new interaction is, and we finally now arrive at it, robbery. “All societies,” Whitehead argues, “require interplay with their environment; and in the case of living societies this interplay takes the form of robbery” (*PR*, 105). One can imagine two situations. In the first, there are two societies, each stably determined by their own orders. This stabilization is secured the fixity of the experience of the other society: although the two societies are contiguous, they are also exclusionary; they are completely other to each other. Their stability resides precisely in the maintenance of this exclusion, a maintenance that is imposed and enacted, and means only that the individual members of the societies are others to each other. The members of one society do not experience the members of the other society. Yet, in a bid for freedom, one member of one of the societies wishes to experience this other differently, wishes to experience this other positively. A certain novelty is introduced whereby the other is introduced, is brought into, is experienced as a new feeling. This novelty, as we have seen, can lead to the disruption of the society, can lead to its own stability. It is an inappropriate experience, and improper experience, a taking that is not allowed, and, from the perspective of the society cannot be allowed. This new experience must be experienced, by the society, as unlawful, as against the law of the society, as a robbery.

In this way, for Whitehead, the circuitry of morality begins (*PR*, 105), morality as the determination of proper interaction, of proper novelty, of novelty within bounds. A “fanaticism”



(*PR*, 84). A circuitry that is something other than the Nietzschean production of the bad-conscience, another circuitry of morality. A morality against novelty. It is here, in positing this circuitry of moralism, that Whitehead comes closest to Butler's concern with the foreclosures which will already determine in advance certain lives as unlivable. For Whitehead, this is the re-assertion of a morality in the service of securing an ideal order, an ideal order derivative from the past, from a world that no longer is.

Immediately following the announcement of this moral circuit, Whitehead proposes a concept of God as amoral, if not immoral: "The primordial appetitions which jointly constitute God's purpose are seeking intensity, and not preservation" (*PR*, 105). Beyond the metaphysical necessity that Whitehead may find for this conception of God, here he also seems to be aware of the historical movement of societies such that the attachment of morality to God is in the name of a certain enforcement of the law, a certain doubling of moral fanaticism as religious-moral fanaticism. God then becomes the final justification for morality, the final ground of the justification of certain experiences as being beyond the law, against the law, and so punishable by the law. The moral God is the God of justification, judgment, and foreclosure.

It is, quite possibly, this historical determination of a moral God, a determination that has justified, in Whitehead's words, a fanatical moralism, that has caused Butler to shy away from any positive engagement with religion until quite recently. And even here, when she has considered God, Butler writes God out of the text as quickly as she writes God into her text. And so, in the final chapter of *Precarious Life*, Butler takes up a certain positive religious discourse, as a very peculiar reading of Levinas and the voice of God issuing the command, "Though shalt not kill." This command, as Levinas argues, is at once both a temptation and an injunction: the temptation to kill the other, and the injunction against this violence. This, as

Butler notes, produces an anxiety, a “fear for one’s own survival, and there is anxiety about hurting the Other, and these two impulses are at war with each other.... But they are at war with each other in order *not* to be at war” (*PL*, 136-137). Rather than confront the raging religious violence by evacuating God from the morally fanatic scene, Butler suggest figuring God at the very center of this scene, as a certain law giving God. As the giver of law, as law, God will, as all law, produce a certain set of foreclosures, foreclosures on possibility, foreclosures on possible subjects, establishing the limits of proper subjectivity. And yet, the very law that produces these foreclosures will be the law of non-violence, the law prohibiting these very foreclosures, such that the circuitry of foreclosure, the circuitry of violence will be stalled in its own enactment. And so Butler may, finally, be offering this final risk: the risk of God in an age of violence.

## 5. Divine possibilities

From a number of differing traditions, political theory has again taken up a certain interest in the religious, such that it is becoming difficult to distinguish political theory from political theology.<sup>115</sup> This interest is, in part, necessitated by the realization that, in the West at least, politics and the political have already been determined by the theological. Within this realization a number of diverse traditions are uneasily coming together to require both attention to the religious in order to understand politics and the political and a turn to the religious in order to move beyond the theological determination of politics and the political. Within this theoretical necessity Judith Butler’s political thought has recently taken up an interest in the religious. Specifically in “Precarious Life,” and “Critique, Coercion, and Sacred Life in

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<sup>115</sup> A recent collection of articles appearing under the heading of “Political Theology” (*Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular- World*, ed. Hent de Vries and Lawrence Sullivan (Fordham University Press, 2006)), for example, contains thirty-four entries, almost exclusively from philosophers and political theorists.

Benjamin's 'Critique of Violence,'" <sup>116</sup> Butler has taken up a religious discourse that is inaugurated by an experience of the divine command "Thou shalt not kill." In these recent works the taking up of religious discourse becomes an occasion for theorizing the ontological rupture of an already theologically determined law. Here Butler argues that the divine command functions in ways other than as law, such that an encounter with the divine command functions to undo the binds of law: the divine command ruptures, as a divine violence, the linear temporality of a theologically determined law whereby subjects are bound to their own subjugation within the law itself. Divine violence, enacted through an encounter within the divine command, becomes a violence against the violence of law and thereby frees the subject to a possibility for life beyond the law. In this, Butler's recent turn to religious discourse is a way to think the limits of subjugation within a theological law, which is also a way to think the limits of law itself and the possibility that can arise at these limits when the law is ruptured.

In both "Precarious Life" and "Critique, Coercion, and Sacred Life," the religious discourse that is taken up arises out of a religious experience: an encounter with the divine command "Thou shalt not kill." In "Precarious Life" it is not a direct encounter with the divine interdiction that is in question, but rather, drawing on Emmanuel Levinas, Butler explores this divine interdiction as it is 'spoken' through the unspeaking face of the Other. Through Levinas, Butler is able to return to the key problematic of much of her earlier work: the assumptive force of law in the determination of subjects. <sup>117</sup> Continuing to advance an understanding of this

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<sup>116</sup> Judith Butler, "Critique, Coercion, and Sacred Life in Benjamin's 'Critique of Violence,'" in *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-secular World*, eds. Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 201-219. Further references to "Critique, Coercion, and Sacred Life" will appear in text, indicated by "CC" where necessary.

<sup>117</sup> In *Bodies that Matter* an already religiously inflected rendering of assumption becomes the key critical concept through which Butler is able to both counter any supposed misreading of her earlier work and advance performativity beyond a mere performance. Assumption comes to designate the functional logic by which the law creates sexed subjects through "citational practices instituted within a juridical domain – a domain of constitutive restraints. The embodying of sex would be a kind of 'citing' of the law, but neither the sex nor the law can be said

assumptive logic, in “Precarious Life” the divine command takes place in and through the approach of the Other, so that the citational practice by which this command is assumed is always already a relational citation. Although there is, in the “Preface” to *Precarious Life*, an attempted distancing from the theorization of this relational interdependence (*PL*, xiii), the political ontology that is developed through this reading of the Levinasian reading of the divine command is already a relational ontology.

With a particular scriptural seriousness, Butler draws from the Biblical narrative that relates God’s giving of the law to Moses that “the face [of the Other] makes various utterances at once: it bespeaks an agony, an injurability, at the same time that it bespeaks a divine prohibition against killing” (*PL*, 135). In inaugurating a relationally citational practice—in citing the divine interdiction as the already spoken ground of one’s being in the presence of an Other—the encounter with the face of the Other through which the divine interdiction is announced becomes the generative occasion of a struggle, a tensed struggle that resides “at the heart of ethics” (*PL*, 135). This tensed struggle is created through the approach of the Other, a drawing near that creates both a fright—the experience of having one’s own precarious life put into question by the Other—and an anxiety—the possible necessity of harming the Other in self-defense (*PL*, 137). As Butler argues, within this Levinasian reading of the divine command, if the approach of the other creates both a fright and an anxiety this is because the encounter with the Other within the strictures of the divine command presents both the limits of one’s being as well as the limits of one’s relation to the Other. The approach of the face exposes the self as a being that can be killed, while also encountering this Other as one who can be killed, but whose killing is already prohibited by the divine command. The being of the self and the Other remain always in this

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to preexist their various embodying and citings.” *Bodies that Matter*, especially chapter 3: “Phantasmic Identification and the Assumption of Sex.”

irreducible and threatening tension of encountering a protected threat, being always exposed to that which is approaching. This relation with the Other can never be resolved into a simple reciprocity of pure being with the Other. The assumption into the relational command does not and cannot function to produce a secure or stable subjectivity, producing instead a tensed encounter with the Other as well as a tensed experience of the precariousness of life itself.

In “Benjamin’s ‘Critique of Violence’” it is no longer a relationally citational practice that is at issue, for the divine command itself can be met in itself and for the subject itself. As Butler argues, Benjamin “invokes the commandment as mandating only that an individual struggle with the ethical edict communicated by the imperative” (“CC,” 205), such that it is the divine command itself with which “each individual must wrestle without the model of any other” (“CC,” 212). Even though, as Butler notes, the divine command is understood by Benjamin in relation to the general strike, the divine command itself is always presented as being addressed to an individual, so that it is within the inner-life of the subject that the divine command is effective.

Within this individual encounter, the divine command itself can only be met with struggle for the divine command is precisely not a law, being without the means for enforcing a singular acquiescence to itself (“CC,” 204). When met within a subjugation to a law that has already enforced its own authority to bind, the divine command that leaves open the possibility of its own application opens a space for possibility within this other-than-law itself. It is the opening of possibility, of struggle, of wrestling with the command that becomes the possibility for a political subjectivity that undoes the binds of law already subjugating the subject. Although leaving behind the possibility of a relational subjectivity, “Benjamin’s ‘Critique of Violence’” advances beyond the tensed struggle occasioned within the face of the command in “Precarious

Life,” such that now the struggle occasioned by the divine command is that which shakes free a subjectivity captured in a law that allows for no struggle, a law that disavows any struggle as already necessarily being a struggle in violation of the law. To the extent that Butler, following Benjamin, understands the binding law as enacting a violence, the divine command acts against the violent binding of the law. In this violence against violence, the commandment, as Butler argues, “establishes a point of view on law that leads to the destruction of law as coercively binding” (“CC,” 209).

If we will risk designating a religious turn in Butler’s thought at this point, this can only be understood as a turn to religion and the theological discourses arising from the religious as necessitated by the already theological determination of the law.<sup>118</sup> A religious turn, it seems, becomes the only possibility for unbinding an already religiously determined law. In this, Butler does not abandon her previously articulated critique of theology. In this difficult sense, the religious is turned against itself within a determination of the divine command as opposed to the law. The law that has been grounded in theology is seen to be undone in and by a divine command that is not law. The failure of the theological law, which has always been central in Butler’s thought for grounding the possibility of another (un)lawful existence, is now seen to arise from a confrontation with a divine command that is not law and which thereby opens a positive possibility. Within this critical theological discourse, arising out of the religious experience of another non-law, it is the non-binding divine command that frees the subject into another temporality and another causation. In attempting to think a political subjectivity that can

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<sup>118</sup> Within Butler’s theological critique, the theological designates, in part, a conceptualization of power modeled on sovereign divine power. With this, the theological designates the fixing of the relation between temporality and causation, whereby power itself operates with a linear temporality matched by a single causation, both grounded in and through a prior subject that is subsequently bound to its own lawful or unlawful acting. The theological becomes a way of designating the religious binding of subjects in and to the law of their own subjugation. A binding that itself is occluded and disappears in its very operation.

undo the binds of a theological law Butler is drawn to a religious subjectivity that is able to enact a rupture within the subjugating functionality of law itself (*PL*, 138).

The encounter with the divine command becomes the fundamental failure of the law to be binding. If in her previous critique of theology, theology designated the determination of the law as perfectly binding, the religious now designates a command that will always fail as law—that functions as a command in providing the instance for a failure of law. This failure, in opening a certain perspective on the law, does so by opening into an experience of the conditions of law itself. Although in the opening of “Critique, Coercion, and Sacred Life” Butler strictly announces Benjamin’s distinctions between mythic violence and divine violence, within the rhythm of the messianic which is opened to by divine violence, this distinction is blurred. The destruction which follows from divine violence provides an opening to an originary rhythm, a destructiveness, which is the “constantly recurring condition” of both positive law and legal violence (“CC,” 214).

On the one hand, it seems, the divine violence opens to the precariousness of life already articulated in “Precarious Life,” though now that precariousness is understood in terms of a rhythm of perpetual downfall. On the other hand, in “Benjamin’s ‘Critique of Violence,’” this rhythmic destructiveness itself designates the sacredness of life, installing at the heart of life both a sacredness and a transience (“CC,” 217). Transience itself then becomes the continual downfall and suffering of all life, which is also the condition of both mere life and sacred life. In this sense, positive law, the violence of law, is the violence of transforming this continual downfall into a binding guilt by which the transient suffering subject is deemed responsible and guilty for a suffering that is its own sacred condition for being (“CC,” 216). Acting against this binding, the divine command enacts a violence that provides an expiatory opening into the

suffering and transience of life. Through this violence against violence, mere life is understood as being transformed into sacred life (“CC,” 216-217). In reading “Precarious Life” and “Benjamin’s ‘Critique of Violence’” together, the experience of the divine command, in inaugurating a tensed realization of the precariousness of life, an experience of the transience of life “functions as the ground for the apprehension of life’s value” (“CC,” 219).

The value of life is designated, here, as the sacredness of life, so that it is within the tensed encounter with the divine command that the subject is freed into an experience of the sacredness of life.<sup>119</sup> Yet this experience of the sacredness of life will always, for Butler, remain as the outside of any positive law or order. In “Precarious Life,” the experience which arises from an encounter with the divine command is not yet designated as an experience of the sacredness of life, yet the experience of the divine command already attains a position as the troubling outside of any political order. It is in this sense that Butler problematizes Levinas’ claim that the divine command is what should be heard in the meaning of Europe (*PL*, 135). For Butler, to insist on hearing this command as the meaning of Europe is to insist that there is no recognizable Europe in this meaning precisely because the divine command can give rise to no positive civilization. If a Europe is to arise from this command, it is precisely and only within the psychic circuitry of the tension that arises as the experience of the divine command. Whatever possible civilization may arise from this tension is itself grounded in the negative overcoming of the psychic displacement of accounting for the guilt arising from a forbidden desire.

In “Critique, Coercion, and Sacred Life” Butler is more insistent that the divine command itself cannot give rise to any positive law. First, the divine command is itself understood in

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<sup>119</sup> For a further exploration of Butler’s continued conversation with Giorgio Agamben concerning sacred life, see Loizidou, *Judith Butler*, especially “Double Law,” 87-128.



terms of being a command, and not a law. Any translation of this command into law will itself undo the command as a command, rendering as impossible the struggle that the command inaugurates. More fundamentally, the divine command cannot itself ground any positive law to the extent that the divine command is only announced once the law has already been effective (“CC,” 210). The commandment then only functions as disruptive, as breaking the binds of law, but this is itself a breaking that has no possibility of opening to a life of what is broken. This life that is opened becomes, then, “an omission, a failure to show, to comply, to endorse . . . [a] refusal to act” (“CC,” 219). What, we are left to ask, is this negative existence?

Within his speculative metaphysics Whitehead’s encounters with God are far from singular or complete so that a final interpretation of his determination of God and the relation between God and order will not be possible here,<sup>120</sup> just as Butler’s own nascent struggles with a religious discourse forbid any claims to finality. As Lewis Ford has argued, a double trajectory can be traced in the development of Whitehead’s speculative metaphysic.<sup>121</sup> On the one hand, there is the movement that will eventuate in an ontology of actual occasions as concrescent activity of becoming in the midst of multiplicity. With the achievements reached in the ontological development of actual occasions, Whitehead is able to develop a conception of God that eventuates in the determination of God as dipolar becoming. This doubled development is not only a struggle to determine the ontology of actual occasions and God, or the relation between actual occasions and God, but is directly, for Whitehead, a question of order and possibility. It is, as Whitehead continually insists, that God is a necessary element of his metaphysic to account for both order and possibility as arising within this order.

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<sup>120</sup> See Lewis S. Ford, *Transforming Process Theism*, foreword Robert Cummings Neville, SUNY Series in Philosophy (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000), especially Part One.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

As we have already seen, Whitehead proposes the necessity of a secularization of God. The necessity of secularization requires that the determination of God is itself preceded by a two-fold critique of religious determinations of God. First, Whitehead proposes a metaphysical critique of determinations of God. Any metaphysical determination of God, Whitehead argues, must satisfy the ecological requirements of that metaphysic. God cannot, in other words, “be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse” (*PR*, 343). More importantly, though, Whitehead also proposes a theological critique of determinations of God. In *Process and Reality* Whitehead argues that theological determinations of God produce “the doctrine of an aboriginal, eminently real, transcendent creator, at whose fiat the world came into being, and whose imposed will it obeys. . . . When the Western world accepted Christianity, Caesar conquered; and the received text of Western theology was edited by its lawyers” (*PR*, 342). Whitehead’s theological critique is itself, then, also a political critique. Within the “Western world,” a designation that requires a further elaboration to be accurate, God has become a legislator, functioning through law in the absolute determination of that which is to be. This determination itself is read as following from God’s will, although it is, Whitehead argues, the will of an imperial domination that is being enacted. In this way, the will of God comes to justify the will of Caesar whose own desire has supplanted that of God.

This political-theological critique of the determination of God begins Whitehead’s own constructive determination of God, and it is only after the effect of this critique has been registered that Whitehead proposes a threefold determination of God as “the outcome of creativity, the foundation of order, and as the goad towards novelty” (*PR*, 88). In this threefold determination, God is not creativity itself, but rather the first accident of creativity, the accident of creativity that allows creativity to become actuality (*PR*, 7). As that which presents creativity

to become actual, God is both the foundation of order and the percipient occasion for creativity to arise as novelty and not simply as repetition. Yet as both foundation and goad toward novelty God is determined by a singular purpose: the seeking of intensity within actual occasions (*PR*, 88). With this determination of God's purpose as evocative of intensity the evocation of societies becomes a "purely subsidiary" desire (*PR*, 105). Although God is the foundation of order, this is precisely in order to produce intensity, just as societies, Whitehead argues, are necessary as that out of which intensity arises (*PR*, 83).<sup>122</sup> With this, Whitehead's entire metaphysic becomes an articulation of the conditions for the ontological production of occasions of intensity.<sup>123</sup>

Intensity is, for Whitehead, the structural production through which the relation between order, the subject, and the divine are related. It might appear, at this point, that a certain agreement arises between Whitehead and Butler. It may be argued that the intense inner struggle that Butler argues arises from an encounter with the divine command can be understood in relation to the divine desire for intensity in the becoming of occasions. It would then be possible to move directly, within Whitehead, from a determination of God as desiring of intensity to the divine rupture of order and law as being the means for intensity to be actualized, deploying in this move the conceptual and theoretical apparatus Butler has developed. Yet Whitehead proposes a third figure for encountering the divine that radically shifts the relation between law and order. In distinction from the position articulated in "Precarious Life," God is, for Whitehead, the ground of the becoming of each actual occasion in its own becoming as providing its own subjective aim.<sup>124</sup> God is not, for Whitehead, mediated from outside through a normative relationality, but is within the relationality of all becoming itself. By figuring God as

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<sup>122</sup> Faber, *God as Poet of the World*, 135.

<sup>123</sup> Jones, *Intensity*.

<sup>124</sup> Faber, *God as Poet of the World*, 96-98.

within an already metaphysical relationality, Whitehead is able to theorize relationality itself without determining God as the cause or transcendent ground of being nor as the total outside of relationality (*PR*, 65).

In distinction from the position articulated in both “Precarious Life” and “Benjamin’s ‘Critique of Violence’,” Whitehead determines God not as a giver of law, nor even giver of command, but as the Principle of Concretion (*SMW*, 174, *PR*, 244), as foundation of order not by law or divine fiat, but as valuator of possibility (*PR*, 31).<sup>125</sup> This is, then, to fully register the effect of Whitehead’s theological critique of the determination of God. For Whitehead, to understand God principally in terms of the giver of law is to already determine God as Caesar. This is also to already determine the world as obeying the divine fiat of will. When all order is given over to the will of law, God and the world appear as already determined to an economy of political and law bound will. For Whitehead, the secularization of God entails the necessity for a secularization of metaphysics itself. And this metaphysical secularization proposes not simply the failure of the law, but the abandonment of the law as the ground of being and possibility. Within Whitehead, it is not the failure of the law that opens up possibility but a rejection of the lawful as the determination of both God and the world that undoes the law of Caesar itself.

In determining God as the Principle of Concrescence and the ground of possibility, God not only does not dictate the world through law, but neither does God order the world by judgment. God is rather the primordial decision through which, as Whitehead argues, “the barren inefficient disjunction of abstract potentialities obtains primordially the efficient conjunction of ideal realization” (*PR*, 40).<sup>126</sup> As Steven Shaviro argues, situating Whitehead in relation to both Kant and Deleuze, God functions as both the limitative and inclusive disjunctive

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 133.

synthesis: performing the primordial decision from which all other decisions can occur, while also providing, in this primordial decision, a wider scope of possibility in distributing a new composition of possibility itself.<sup>127</sup> It is as primordial decision that God becomes the primordial occasion of novelty, grounding all becoming through decision and proposing what might be to that which arises from what has been. It is in this divine decision that novelty becomes not only possible, but conceivable (*PR*, 40).

It is also in this sense that God is, for Whitehead, primordial irrationality. For this divine decision from which all other decisions flow is itself the ground of decisive rationality. God is therefore, Whitehead argues, “the ultimate limitation, and His existence is the ultimate irrationality” (*SMW*, 178). It would seem that God is, for Whitehead, determined within what is for Butler, in her reading of Benjamin, the mythic. Here then, God would be performing the primordial instance of formative violence, a formative violence that does not answer to any previous law or rationality, but is itself the ground for law and rationality (“CC,” 201-202). God would be, if not Caesar, then the enactor of a primordial violence of law, whereby violence would become the final ground of all becoming and being. The production of being out of the flux of becoming would be nothing more than an inseparable from this primordial violence.

Whitehead does not shy away from the realization that God, as the Principle of Concrescence, performs a primordial decision that is a primordial limitation. There is, Whitehead acknowledges, a certain “ruthlessness of God” as the Principle of Concrescence; a ruthlessness that is “inexorable in God” (*PR*, 244). This ruthlessness is the ruthlessness of any decision, where decision refers not first to consciousness, but to ‘cutting off’ (*PR*, 43). Even so, it is difficult to render this ruthlessness as simply a violence against life, as an arresting of life

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<sup>127</sup> Steven Shaviro, *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics*, Technologies of Lived Abstractions, eds. Brian Massumi and Erin Manning (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009). See especially, “God, or the body without organs.”

(“CC,” 208). On the one hand, Whitehead argues that this is a necessary ruthlessness, a ruthless decision that must be performed in order for any becoming, or novelty itself, to be possible.<sup>128</sup> Without this primordial decision, the continual process could not become a process of becoming. Decision is, Whitehead argues, the very meaning of actuality (*PR*, 43). The primordial ruthlessness, then, is not itself against life, but is a necessary valuation for the possibility of any becoming; it is a “valuation as an aim towards ‘order’; and ‘order’ means ‘society permissive of actualities with patterned intensity of feeling arising from adjusted contrasts’” (*PR*, 244). With this, Whitehead seems to be acknowledging what Butler has always insisted on: all becoming can only arise out of what is given, and that which is given is only given through limitation, a decisive cutting off.

If it is necessary, though, in following Whitehead, to continue to speak of this primordial decision as a primordial limitation, this is neither the enactment of a totalizing order nor a fundamental foreclosure. Rather, the valuative order that is enacted in this primordial decision is only a partial determination of that which is given, the given out of which actuality arises. Disorder is, Whitehead argues, the correlative of order, and only together do they constitute what is given (*PR*, 83). The ordering that is enacted in the primordial decision is the ordering of that which is given, but not in its totality. It is rather a primordial decision that creates the condition for a further decision, the decision of an actual occasion in its own becoming.<sup>129</sup> As Whitehead argues, “An actual entity arises from decisions *for* it, and by its very existence provides decisions *for* other actual entities which supersede it” (*PR*, 43). Thus actuality is constituted as a successive series of decisions, decisions within what is given as ordered thereby providing an

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<sup>128</sup> Gregg Lambert, “On Whitehead’s Proposition: ‘Life is Robbery’: Prolegomena to Any Future Ethics,” in *Secular Theology: American Radical Theological Thought*, ed. Clayton Crockett (New York: Routledge, 2001), 92-103.

<sup>129</sup> Faber, *God as Poet of the World*, 97.

ordered given to what is to come. Yet this series of decisions are not, in themselves, complete determinations of the decisions to come. Rather, decisions are made *for* actual occasions only so that they, in their own singularity, may make their own decisions, and so attain their own actuality. Decision, the decision to enact and how to enact prior decision, is then both the ground and responsibility for each actual occasion, determining itself amidst a continuing flux of prior decisions (*PR*, 88).

In positing the successive arising of actuality as a series of decisions, as a series of limitations, Whitehead finally enacts the fundamental secularization not only of God but of creativity itself (*PR*, 343). For it is in this sense, Whitehead argues, “that God can be termed the creator of each temporal actual entity. But this phrase is apt to be misleading by its suggestion that the ultimate creativity of the universe is to be ascribed to God’s volition. The true metaphysical position is that God is the aboriginal instance of this creativity, and is therefore the aboriginal condition which qualifies its action” (*PR*, 225). With this rejection of the *creatio ex nihilo*<sup>130</sup> the final effect of the secularization of God is felt (*PR*, 21). On the one hand, creativity is designated as the “universal of universals characterizing ultimate matter of fact” (*PR*, 21) and is no longer determined solely as the will of God. On the other hand, the decisive limitation of order is not itself a totalizing enactment of that which is given, but is rather the ground of creativity amidst a given that is both order and disorder.

A strict distance arises, for Whitehead, between a primordial decision that, in its insistent repetitions, aims toward a decisive limitative ordering for the sake of intensity and a primordial violence that, in its constant reiteration, enacts a constant totalized capture of being. For Whitehead this latter full determination of order, the determination of “one ideal order necessary

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<sup>130</sup> John B. Cobb, Jr. and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: an Introductory Exposition* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1976), 65.

for all actual occasions,” only arises from a “disastrous over-moralization of thought under the influence of fanaticism, or pedantry” (*PR*, 84). In a derivative sense of order, where order is a designation of societal order,<sup>131</sup> this over-moralizing fanaticism is itself the social insistence that the given can be determined solely by and as order. This insistence is contrasted by Whitehead, with the metaphysical determination of social order as a series of elicitations,<sup>132</sup> coupled to the contrast, announced in *Adventures of Ideas*, between a civilization grounded in force and a civilization of persuasion. It is the civilization of force that compels a final conformity to a totalized order as an over-moralization of the order of society itself.

It is precisely against this over-moralization that God functions, within Whitehead, as the ground of possibility, the future possibility of the becoming of all actuality. Within the inclusive disjunctive synthesis, God’s envisagement of possibility transforms what appears as given incompatible disorder into intensive contrast, such that the given inheritance of order is “accompanied by a conceptual reaction partly conformed to it, and partly introductory of a relevant novel contrast, but always introducing emphasis, valuation, and purpose” (*PR*, 108). This introduction of relevant novelty is itself the ground of a decision that will become the background of the given from which further decisions will be made. The introduction of relevant novel contrasts opens a possibility for an order of intensity within each occasion that works against any totalized order as a complete determination of what is given. The introduction of this novelty then becomes the given for future occasions in their own becoming. If this novelty, in inaugurating a serial order of that which is given, seems to open to a determination of that which is given, a determination that itself installs a determined order, Whitehead will still insist that

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<sup>131</sup> For Whitehead, ‘order’ in its primary designation refers to that which is ordered for an individual actual occasion. All social order is, for Whitehead, derivative from this primary meaning of order (*PR*, 89).

<sup>132</sup> In its metaphysical sense, a society is, for Whitehead, “a nexus of actual entities which are ‘ordered’ among themselves.” (*PR*, 89) This ordering is a shared ordering, being based not on an imposition of order, but rather on an eliciting of an complex of eternal objects which is the societies defining characteristic. (*PR*, 92)



God, as the ground of this novelty, is “seeking intensity, and not preservation” (*PR*, 105).

Whatever novel possibility is inaugurated here is inaugurated not to establish another order, but rather, the order that is established is itself for intensity, for an intensity of becoming. It is, as always, for Whitehead, order for intensity, and not primarily an order of intensity.

To follow Whitehead’s demand for a secularization of God is not simply, then, to demand a recognition of nor the elaboration of the possibility of the failure of law as the determination of order. It is rather to demand a reconfiguration of the series of relations constituted by the determination of God as divine lawgiver, giving a law that can determine all order in its totality. This is to refigure the relation between God and law, which is also a determination of the relation between God and order. Yet once these relations are refigured, it also becomes necessary to refigure the relation between God and creativity, determining the nature of creativity itself. With this complete secularization of God, Whitehead is led to posit the audacious possibility of a civilization of Peace, where order is always an ordering *for* and not an ordering *of*.

## 6. A body politic to come

With this, then, we arrive at a final determination of a post-secular political ontology. This is a politics of the future (*ES*, 90), which is itself also a politics of the return of the religious, where the religious is always returning, returning as a divine violence rupturing history to its own possibility of becoming otherwise.<sup>133</sup> Working through and with Butler and Whitehead, we arrive at a political ontology of the future, opened by the continual return of the religious.

The religious is not, of course, the only opening of history that we have encountered. History, as the “sedimentation” of our becoming (*BTM*, 245, fn. 8), that process within which we are always already engaged (*AI*, 46), is never completely closed or foreclosed upon. The

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<sup>133</sup> Roland Faber, “God’s Advent/ure: The End of Evil and the Origin of Time,” in *World Without End: Christian Eschatology from a Process Perspective*, ed. Joseph A. Bracken, S.J. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 102

negativity of decision which is at the heart of every becoming allows history to always remain not only the given of what has been, but also the given of what might have been (*BTM*, 233-236; *PR*, 226-227). The past is always, in this sense, a usable past, usable as the ground of possible futures.<sup>134</sup> History can never be fully captured by its own becoming, remaining always a contingent practice of decision given precisely as and through these contingent decisions perishing in order to give rise to a novel future.<sup>135</sup>

If history can never be fully captured by its own being, it can also never be fully captured by practices of representation. Language is a continual failure, is predicated precisely on this failure as a poetic lure for becoming. As we have seen, for Whitehead the limits of language require that philosophic practice become precisely as a practice of becoming, always remaining open to its own future of development. This future of philosophy comes through its own practice of conceptual creation, luring itself forward into experiences that have yet to come. For Butler, this philosophical practice is itself the determination of a political practice as the continual contestation of representation and recognizability. To recognize the limit of language is at once to recognize politics as a continual contestation of language as possibility.<sup>136</sup>

Actuality is not, of course, simply a matter of its public history; it is also the occasion of its private becoming. But this privacy is always a privacy that is shot through with otherness, a relational becoming as the coming together of that which is given. If, as Whitehead insists, occasions become in the privacy of their own immediacy, this becoming is always a becoming together of others; relationality, in other words, is not simply to designate the becoming together of a community, but always the becoming together of a constitutive otherness. The other is

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<sup>134</sup> Ranu Samantrai, *AlterNatives: Black Feminism in the Postimperial Nation*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002, 131-132.

<sup>135</sup> Geoff Boucher, "Politics of Performativity: A Critique of Judith Butler," *Parrhesia* 1 (2006): 117.

<sup>136</sup> Catherine Mills, "Contesting the Political: Butler and Foucault on Power and Resistance," *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 11, no.3 (2003): 254.

always already present in the self as the repeated condition of its becoming.<sup>137</sup> Although Butler has announced a certain hesitation with conceptualizing relationality, in her recent work she has taken up a much more explicitly relational thought in the name of a precarious and vulnerable subjectivity.<sup>138</sup> With this, Butler has come to arrive at a Whiteheadian determination of the subject as an ek-static subjectivity, always being opened by and opened to a becoming of possibility transcending it owns being.<sup>139</sup>

Possibility does not then arise simply from a divine violence. Power is always a movement that is open to its own divergencies of becoming. What, then, are we finally to make of this religious return, of this return of the religious as an opening of possibility? It is, quite simply, without any simplicity, the in-sistence of metaphysical possibility, of what we have already designated as the possibility of an ecological politics, a politics of the world. In the work of Butler, this turn to religion itself enacts a certain return, a return to the metaphysics of her own beginning, the metaphysical movement of desire. To see this, it is possible to begin by noting two religious turns in Butler's work: a turn to an exploration of the secular, as the contemporary structure of our time, which is not our only time; and a turn to the theological in and through her reading of the divine violence.

In a series of recent articles Butler has taken up the question of the secular, and in particular, the question of the constitution of the secular as an always contested, and so political, task. The secular, and the religious against which it is posed, Butler argues, is neither an institutional order nor an achievement; it is rather a normative practice, or rather, a framework, a

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<sup>137</sup> Nobo, *Whitehead's Metaphysics of Extension and Solidarity*, 112.

<sup>138</sup> This is most directly the case in the collection *Precarious Life* and the more recent *Giving An Account of Oneself*.

<sup>139</sup> Jones, *Intensity*, 198.

framework which is taken up in our being and acting in the world;<sup>140</sup> specifically, a framework for determining the social field as private and public (“JZ?” 70), governed by a particular temporality of freedom (*FW*, 101),<sup>141</sup> populated by particular, and particularized, subjects (*FW*, 108), subjects that we can, in drawing a connection that Butler has not herself made, designate as subjects of theological simplicity.<sup>142</sup> The secular is, then, the always unstable, always mobile, always differentiated and differentiating production of a place and of a time (*FW*, 103), within which one takes up the task of becoming a subject. Without here elaborating the content of these productions, that which appear as the substantive determination “Muslim,” “secular,” “Western,” “homophobic,” “gay,” “free,” etc., an elaboration that I imagine we will be entered into tonight, we can here designate, at least as a sketch, the formal structure of this practice which is named the secular.

But to begin, this is already to misname the practice. For the secular cannot be thought in its simplicity because it is not practiced in a simple isolation from the religious (“JZ?” 71). The secular is, rather, the practices of this separation, just as the religious is, in this sense, the practices of the separation. The secular and the religious are both the negativity of their differentiation, functioning precisely as this negation as that which they are not. There is, then, a mutual implication between the secular and the religious, within which they are equally bound to each other (*FW*, 122). With this binding, and in our historical moment, which is to say within our history, Butler argues for a certain priority of the religious. Our secular is, as many have argued, an achievement of Christianity, and, in particular, Protestant Christianity, so that religion

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<sup>140</sup> Judith Butler, “Is Judaism Zionism?” in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*. Judith Butler, Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, and Cornel West, ed. with intro. by Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathon Van Antwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 71. Further references to “Is Judaism Zionism?” will appear in text, indicated by “JZ?” where necessary.

<sup>141</sup> Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* New York: Verso, 2009, 101. Further references to *Frames of War* will appear in text, indicated by *FW* where necessary.

<sup>142</sup> Following Talal Asad, we can designate these subjects as “citizen.” See *Formations of the Secular*, 5.

“underwrites the framework within which we are operating,” (“JZ?” 71), underwritten, we might add, as the normative demand of and for a simple theological subject.

The priority of the religious in our secular is itself achieved as the establishment of and the differentiation of the private and the public in and as the social space of our belonging. The public sphere is, in this sense, the negative achievement of Protestant Christianity as its establishment of a private religious sphere (“JZ?” 71). If the secular is, as is often proposed, an achievement of the privatization of religion as the safeguard of the public, this is itself a public that is inhabited by the religious, by a Protestant Christianity, as the secular (“JZ?” 71). If religion is the outside of the secular as the private outside the public, this outside is only achieved by a particular religion remaining in the public sphere, remaining unmarked, known only as its effects. The secular, then, becomes the means for the survival of the religious as other than its own determinate being as outside (“JZ?” 72).

In addition to being a spatial demarcation of public space, the secular is a determination of time, one temporality amidst the many times of our time (*FW*, 101), a time that is itself the determination of the place of the secular (*FW*, 103). To speak of time, in this sense, is not simply to speak of the temporality of being, a temporality that Butler has already determined as reiteration, the continual citational practice by which one becomes. Time is, rather, a certain structuring and ordering of this temporality, an ordering through which subjects of time appear within time. The time of the secular, as determined to be secular time, is a teleological time of progress (*FW*, 104). This is, of course, a rather well rehearsed determination of our time, the time not only of the secular, but the modern, although it is precisely the ease of this conflation that comes to trouble Butler as she attempts to disentangle the various times of our lives. For if we too easily use this teleological time to conflate the secular and the modern, and both, if we are

to play out this well known narrative, as arising as the culmination of a Judeo-Christian rendering of time as linear, have we already assumed as the limit of our critique this teleological time that produces in its wake a singular cultural sphere? If the secular becomes the modern in and through this time, this is always an achievement of time and in time, and so our critical engagements must always attempt a disentanglement of our times precisely as the entanglement of our being. It is only after this religious secular that the theological can appear in Butler's work arriving as it's return, an arrival that we can tentatively designate as the post-secular theological appearance of the divine.

As we have already seen, the appearance of the divine as a divine violence enacts a struggle, an inner struggle that is an inner intensity, an intensity that itself enacts a messianic expiation of the subject already caught in and as a guilt before the law. Divine violence is after, if it is after anything at all, an immediacy of intensity, an intensity of inner struggle occasioned by the command to not kill, an intensity that opens the subject to its own messianic transience, its own perpetual downfall in and as the negativity of this negative command to preserve life. This is a command by which the subject is bound to an Other in the negativity of freeing life, so that the subject theological undone is a subject of immediate ecstatic intensity. So that finally if divine violence is after anything it is after the immediacy of desire.

But what, in the end, are we to make of this other, this other theological command, this appearance of theology? Certainly it is other to the secular, arising only after the downfall of the secular, although also remaining necessarily in relation to this other, taking into itself the history of its own appearance. If this theological appearance is the appearance of a law, or a kind of law, it is not quite a human law, just as if it appears in the Face of the Other, it appears in a Face that is not quite a human face. This appearance of the theological, as an appearance of a divine

violence that comes from elsewhere, from an other than human elsewhere, might then be an appearance of the ecological, as the (re)appearance of metaphysical desire, a desire that opens to and is opened by the world.

As we have already seen, religion is, for Whitehead, a feeling of world-loyalty, a feeling of being within the world as being undone by the world of one's becoming. The religious returns, then, as the ever returning event through which the subject is ecologically undone in its own becoming otherwise. It is unsurprising, then, that at this moment, when Butler's own work is beginning to make a religious turn, taking up its own religious possibility, it is also taking up and being taken up into a series of ecological concerns.<sup>143</sup> The divine opening of possibility is then an opening which is the undoing the subject not simply in its sociality but also, and more fundamentally, in its ecological becoming, opening to a becoming otherwise of not just the subject but of the world itself. It is, in other words, a becoming otherwise of a politics that is already an ecological politics of becoming. The post-secular event is then the event of possibility, a possibility for the world, a possibility for a world of and still with a future to come.

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<sup>143</sup> See, on the one hand, her recent lecture "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street" (<http://www.eipcp.net/transversal/1011/butler/en>), as well as her contribution to the *Becomings, Misplacements, Departures* conference.

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