

# Carrying Over the Burdens of Trace: Weaving together Civic Rituals on the Silk Roads of the Post-Apocalypse



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## Abstract

This "text" discusses how capitalism, colonialism, and trauma are linked to various present-day crises, including issues related to civic engagement, environmental collapse, addiction, and collective trauma. The work argues for the inevitability of universalism by going through a history of how neoliberalism colonized the world and our minds. After surveying these various crossroads of contemporary precariousness, the crises of strategic intimacies, and the paralysis of endless reductionist calculi, in this work we will come to acknowledge how between the nightmares of history and a technologically overdetermined and ecologically devastated future, an examination of civic life must start from within the throngs of devotees so mesmerized by the circulations of global finance. Out of a mélange of conflicting paradigms, I look to two prevailing belief systems that underpin the most populous language-cultures of the internet; which both locate each other from the utmost periphery of one another; both have underlying religious ideologies that may aid in the acculturation of inclusive institutions which work to affirm differences among their respective congregations. Encountering a convergence from the utmost periphery from the other, gives each perspective the potential to see how they are in a "constitutive relationship with (their) own outside," to question their own universality, as well as realizing the inadequacies that come from within" (Balibar, 36). After analyzing the political implications of the philosophies of Hegel and Spinoza, in relation to Christian and Confucian theologies, I end by admonishing "us" to take responsibility as inscribers of ritual to heal ghosts of collective trauma.

## Perhaps We Are All Ritual Practitioners

We are all mediators, translators.  
In philosophy, as in any other domain, one has to deal, without ever being sure, with what is implicit in the accumulated reserve, and thus with a great many mediations (teaching, newspapers, journals, books, media), together with the responsibility assumed by these mediations.  
- Interview with Derrida (Wood, 71-72).

After eight or nine hoots on the pipe... How does it make me feel?  
Like a fool first of all, but I dunno, it's a ritual, I guess.  
- Gabor Mate in conversation with a patient (Mate, 31)

The key process is participants' mutual entrainment of emotion and attention, producing a shared emotional/cognitive experience.  
- Collins on Ritual, (2004, 48)

Socrates questioned everything, from Greek grammatical usage to the existence of Gods.  
He paid attention to dreams and oracles, but not to ritual.  
When Plato tells us that Socrates sacrifices a cock or a hen, at home or on an altar of the state, he performs this rite automatically, without recognizing the need for an explanation, much as we would switch on our favorite channel.  
(Stall, XIV)

I invite you to take a moment to reflect on the pervasiveness of rituals in our lives.<sup>1 2</sup> From how we organize our morning, what we think, explore and feel throughout the day, to the earworms and idiosyncratic expressions that ruminate through the thoughts that we share to ourselves and others. Whether as a seemingly mundane habit like brushing teeth to interrupt the growth of contamination, or as an elaborate custom where extensive planning is needed to commemorate significance, our lives are interspersed with ritual. Perhaps we can extend this notion by imagining the endless scrolling on smartphones during commutes to work, the interminable reliving of World Wars in video games, the occasional escape into imagination when reading in bookstores, the queue at a cafe, the regularized water cooler talk at work, the insatiable monitoring for validation on social media, and the weekly gathering for song in

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<sup>1</sup> In Dennis Rook's *The Ritual Dimension of Consumer Behavior* (1985), we find a helpful list of various types of ritual: "media, patriotic, household, grooming, religious, gift giving, business, eating, rite of passage, holiday, romantic, athletic, and bedtime" (251).

<sup>2</sup> And with respect to the introduction of the *Dao Companion* (2016) we should include the "liuyi 六藝 (Six Arts): ritual, music, archery, driving, writing, and calculating" (Shen, 3, 54).

churches, as all sharing in some *ritualistic* affinities.

Whether all these behaviors can be analyzed as 'ritual' is a question asked by a broad variety of disciplines including those in anthropology, sociology, philosophy, history, religion, and cultural studies. Both the philosopher Jürgen Habermas and the anthropologist Jack Goody have expressed skepticism over the efficacy of such *flattened* approaches to the concept of ritual that tries to encompass virtually every activity from "elections, schools, work groups, and the rituals of family living" (Goody, 26).<sup>3</sup> It is true that casting all repetitive activity under one system may indeed be charged with a narcissistic universality. Contrary to these insights however, and inspired by Herbert Fingarette's work on Confucianism, I forward that perhaps this approach is a particular remedy for the universalized corruptions that have already taken hold throughout the globe. So instead of defining 'ritual' based on necessary and sufficient conditions or isolating "residual categories" and siphoning off "ritual-like" behaviors,<sup>4</sup> I start from a 'secularized sacredness' that, as we will see, is shared by both Fingarette's Confucianism and a reading of Christian Revelation, where the whole of society is regarded as participating in a *ceremony* with varying levels of salience. From this view, the rituals of alcoholics and the rituals of 'Alcoholic Anonymous' are not severed from one another and there is no question of what 'inauthentic ritual' could mean, as when certain religious or political situations are colloquially referred to as being "just a ritual" (Rothenbuhler, 30-31).

Comparable to the study of *Chinese Public Theology* (2019), where Alexander Chow invests in the argument that Confucianism aids in allowing Christianity to "resist common dichotomies" (146) I explain my preference for the term 'ritual' over 'habit' not because it "resists"<sup>5</sup> but because it *evokes and complicates*<sup>6</sup> these tensions; between, for example, the secular and the sacred, individual and collective perspectives, persistent and changing traditions, particularist and universalist outlooks, as well as subjects and objects of study. With reference to Derrida's *Differance*, following through to the logical conclusions of dichotomies opens up fissures that, when disclosed, only reveal further dichotomies. This strategy runs in parallel to the findings of John Russon, who adopts "Heideggerean concern for the unselfconscious project of being-in-the-world and Hegel's argument in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* for the necessity of religious *Vorstellungen*, of myth and ritual, within self-conscious

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<sup>3</sup> See also Grimes, *Marrying and Burying* (1995, 217).

<sup>4</sup> See Rothenbuhler, *Ritual Communication* (1998).

society" (Russon, 509) to argue for the potential of 'ritual' to *mediate* the contest between faith and reason.<sup>7</sup>

These dichotomies are also evoked in the work of sociologists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann who use the term "habitualization" as preceding the more collective/social iteration, which they refer to as "institutionalization," where our rituals become so ingrained that it becomes "unnecessary for each situation to be defined anew, step by step" (Berger, 71). Just as even in the most remote areas of the planet we can be sure to find a similar looking airport or mall, their observation allows us to notice how the 'ritual institutions' that have managed to retain the most credibility and spread the farthest "globally" possess an *incessant and peculiar homogeneity*.

...the discourse of postmodernism here functions to suggest that the cultural (not merely the economic) logic of microelectronic capitalism is universal, that the cultural logic that holds for London and Paris and Liverpool and Nevada City also holds for Hong Kong or Bankura or Beirut. (Spivak 1999, 334)

Even through Gayatri Spivak's warnings, within an interconnected multicultural, multifait and multidisciplinary existence, a general sense of the vapidness of our value judgements in the face of overwhelming quantity of information seeps out from the openings *between* heterogeneous, discordant and potentially incommensurable frames of reference. These conflicting, and perhaps incommensurable paradigms are likely enveloped by intersecting and intergenerationally patterned "traumas" (a contested term), bewildering political projects attempting to orient the remnants of 'post'-colonial societies towards values like 'civic engagement' and 'democracy'. Under these circumstances, overly-reductionist questions of survival, usually in the guise of financial viability, amoral science, or the politics of realism, become expedient forms of

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<sup>5</sup> As Shannon Speed argues in *At the Crossroads of Human Rights and Anthropology* (2006), if cultural researchers should care about power dynamics in their research, perhaps they should engage with the "inherent tensions" of their work as it is much more productive than attempts to "avoid or resolve" such complexities.

<sup>6</sup> "Each act of creation resists something—for example, Deleuze says, Bach's music is an act of resistance against the separation of the sacred from the profane. Deleuze does not define what "to resist" means and appears to give this term the current meaning of opposing a force or an external threat. In the conversation on the word resistance in the *Abécédaire*, he adds, with reference to the work of art, that to resist always means to free a potential of life that was imprisoned or offended; however, even here a real definition of the act of creation as an act of resistance is missing" (Agamben 2019, XXX).

<sup>7</sup> There are also relevant affinities between the thought of Hegel and Confucius on the topic of 'morality' in the public sphere: see Johnson, *Social Morality and Social Misfits* (2012).

commensurability that have tangible returns. Indeed, Ahmet Davutoğlu recognizes five categories of *'universalizable' insecurities* that perhaps emanate out of what Norbert Elias refers to as *Civilizing Process* (1982):

(1) the crisis of ontological security and freedom which gave rise to ontological alienation; (2) the epistemological crisis, in which the Enlightenment epistemological formula of “reason, science and progress” ceased to function properly and the fundamentals of the Enlightenment philosophy were shaken; (3) the axiological crisis manifested in ethico-material imbalances. So long as the material and the ethical are not properly interrelated, the material will continue to create its own ethics, and this will be nothing but tyranny. Mechanisms cannot provide justice and cannot solve problems if we cannot embed them in norms and values derived from the essence of human beings (4) the ecological crisis leading to the destruction of ecological harmony; and (5) the crisis of cultural plurality leading to an exclusivist and non-egalitarian conception of the Self and the Other (Dallmayr et al., x).

Like a self-fulfilling prophecy, these insatiable insecurities reinforce a culture of *securitization* which subsumes all aspects of mental and behavioral existence. This is a collective *entrainment* which normalizes a mere *vestigial* subjectivity, limits our imaginations of what society could be, while unwittingly promoting a moral hazard to free ride upon democratic institutions and the civic engagement of others. The energy needed to respond to evermore ecologically inspired collective existential questions are draining. The resolve needed for taking up the emotional labor that democratic, civic participation require, are eroding. And, where once ideals of rights and freedoms, the rule of law, and economic development, were argued to be in support of one another,<sup>8</sup> today these liberal ideals no longer have the same motivational influence of promoting civic life.

Instilling an ethic of civic responsibility traditionally fell upon the shoulders of educational institutions and the free press; by composing and adhering to their own traditions of text and pointing out the blindspots of these assumptions, distinguished thinkers like Gayatri Spivak, Paulo Freire and Edward Said have attempted, through their critical ‘anti-humanist humanism’, to challenge universalist presumptions in order to strengthen the intentions of inclusivity and diversity. However, regardless of all the textual and pedagogical

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<sup>8</sup> See for example, Amartya Sen’s *Development as Freedom* (2001)

efforts to create 'epistemic reconstitutions'<sup>9</sup> that affirm heterogeneity, a metanarrative upheld by a 'ritualistic' imposition within the daily flow of life still serves to force a response from all other ways of generating narratives. As Priya Gopal's seething criticisms of the corporate function of the university in *How Universities Die* (2012) exemplifies, there is an active *complicity* in the practices of these academic institutions. From investments into weapons, through to treating students as customers, the "existence of elite academics is built upon American aggression against countries rich in resources and the domestic inequality that sustains the elite universities" (Leiter, 3).

As robustly examined in the 70's through works like *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (2007) and *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* (1971), Neil Postman extrapolates a "Huxleyan warning" from the contradictions involved as those who wish to retain their influence within these institutions are also "threatened in many respects by the theory of the democratic process and the concept of an ever-renewing society" (Postman 1971, 1); Stefan Collini comments about the striking similarities between the working conditions within universities "with those of staff in a call center" (Collini, 19); Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno note how "culture today is infecting everything with sameness" (Adorno & Horkheimer, 94); in Guy Debord's analysis of *The Societies of the Spectacle* (2016), we find an argument for how society is devalued as all sorts of cultural activity and leisure time are reduced to a fabricated reflection of exchange value; Shoshana Zuboff's *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019) highlights the profits gained information asymmetry and the loss of privacy; David Courtwright's *The Age of Addiction* (2019) discusses how how "limbic capitalism" affects our mental wellbeing; the propensity of feeling alienated even in our affective communities is described in Sarah Ahmed in *Social Objects* (2011); Along with the many texts by Slavoj Žižek, Mark Fisher discusses an inability for our imagination to think otherwise in *Capitalist Realism* (2010); and of course, Herman and Chomsky describe how *Manufacturing Consent* (2008) circumvents the expectations of the *fourth branch* of accountable democratic governance by morphing 'agency' itself:

In sum, the mass media of the United States are effective and powerful ideological institutions that carry out a system-supportive propaganda function by reliance on market forces, internalized assumptions, and self-censorship, and without significant overt coercion. (Herman & Chomsky, 286)

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<sup>9</sup> See Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality* (2018).

From the first moments of *Storming the Bastille* through into and after *la Terreur*, questions remained over *who* was to be included in the revolution.<sup>10</sup> Our starting assumptions about what we decide to include in the scope of our analysis will profoundly modify what we hope to achieve. This is the warning found in Jason Josephson-Storm's *The Myth of Disenchantment* (2017), who views overly nihilistic academic *dispositions*, which may have been inherited from Spinoza's "Pantheism controversy" (Josephson-Storm, 69),<sup>1112</sup> as having a tendency to become *self-fulfilling prophecies* because viewpoints are subject to a negative feedback loop where "any social knowledge" produced by an academic discipline may get "fed back into the system, which is thereby changed" (Josephson-Storm, 11). As such, we must develop an awareness that thwarts these academic-institutional *rituals* which have the potential to solidify their own prophecies, and realize our potential as quotidian inscribers of ritual where we are affecting not only our own lives. It is crucially important to be able to discern between viewpoints that reinforce false optimisms, while also not being bogged down by the self-fulfilling prophecies that arise from assumptions that start from a bare minimum.

On the one hand, as Stephan Pinker explains, we need to give voice to *The Better Angels Of Our Nature* (2011) to acknowledge how humanitarian/humanist philosophies have spread across the world and have continually *made the 'world' safer*. On the other hand, Bruno Latour (2019) admonishes us to disambiguate what exactly we mean when we use the term "world". Similarly, Rosi Braidotti (2019) asks us to be cognizant of what is meant when we use the word '*human*' since from its very inception, what is included in this 'we' has *always* been a site of contestation. 'We' cannot develop an *authentic* optimism without adequately acknowledging the list of afflictions that lay before 'us', like those aptly summarized by David Brooks:

Thirty-five percent of Americans over 45 are chronically lonely.  
Only eight percent of Americans report having meaningful  
conversation with their neighbors. Only 32 percent of Americans

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<sup>10</sup> See Braidotti, 159.

<sup>11</sup> "Spinoza is a philosopher of many posthumous births. He was first viewed as an abominable atheist, then resurrected as the "God Intoxicated man," a romantic pantheist, the great thinker of the multitude, the advocate of the liberated individual, and most recently the most rigorous of the rationalists (to list only a few of his epitaphs). Even if there are many Spinozas, they all converge, at least on one point, his "naturalism." No one denies the twin pillars of Spinozism: the identity of God and Nature and the tenet that "man" is but a tiny "part of Nature"" (Sharp, 1).

<sup>12</sup> For an in depth discussion of this controversy see both Giovanni's *Between Kant and Hege* (2000) and *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill* (1994).

say they trust their neighbors, and only 18 percent of millennials. The fastest-growing political party is unaffiliated. The fastest-growing religious movement is unaffiliated. Depression rates are rising, mental health problems are rising. The suicide rate has risen 30 percent since 1999. For teen suicides over the last several years, the suicide rate has risen by 70 percent. Forty-five thousand Americans kill themselves every year; 72,000 die from opioid addictions; life expectancy is falling, not rising. (Brooks, 2019)

It is particularly illustrative to find such nihilisms leaking through even eminent 'call to arms,' like in Said's *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (2004), when he unwittingly reveals his anxious tiredness with remarks like, "why bother at all?" (Said, 67). If prominent authors of decoloniality reveal such *disenchantment* even within their attempts to motivate our resolve, it reveals how the *homogenous* 'truth' of this metanarrative is still the most verifiable and commensurate across all who encounter it. What seems to be a heterogeneous melange of ritual, mythology, philosophy, narrative and morality, still seems to be collapsing into itself by the weight of equivalency. Regardless of the many attempts and avenues taken to counter this *metanarrative*, there is a burgeoning acknowledgement of how these aggravations are accumulating and contributing to a political milieu of disillusionment, renunciation<sup>13</sup> and *fatigue*,<sup>14</sup> which bears down upon world-views competing to spread their influence across this earth.<sup>15</sup>

These converging predicaments are aptly reflected within Agamben's thesis of *Homo Sacre* (1998), where the 'camp' is located as the true epicenter (*Nomos*) of contemporary politics. Jean-François Lyotard describes it as an *incredulity* towards 'grand-metanarratives' which have taken root "in the discourse of today's financial backers of research, the only credible goal is power. Scientists, technicians, and instruments are purchased not to find truth, but to augment power" (Lyotard, 46). This *epicenter* can also be designated as a site which *enculturates*, what Paul Gilroy characterizes in *Between Camps* (1997), a *survivalist state of mind* that frantically clings onto low-hanging solutions without fully sustaining any attention towards more deferred gratifications.

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<sup>13</sup> For a modern discussion of Max Weber's idea of 'disenchantment', see Jean Pierre Dupuy's *The Mark of the Sacred* (2013) and Jason Josephson Storm's *The Myth of Disenchantment* (2017).

<sup>14</sup> Fatigue is "roughly described as an advanced state of disenchantment" (Braidotti, 19).

<sup>15</sup> See Rosi Braidotti's *Posthuman Knowledge* (2019) as well as Sara Ahmed's *On Being Included* (2012) for discussions of 'fatigue'.



Within this 'camp mentality', the lessons of past tragedies are repressed, but reemerge as farce. When those accustomed to defending their ingroup do so by neglecting to recognize the struggles of distant, unseemly minorities, they re-voke untimely epiphanies; the realization of how a once vehemently defended ingroup has become *increasingly small and less familiar* only comes to fruition when one finds themselves next in line for the guillotine. The *creed* of 'the camp' is sustained through a continual *othering*, 'essentializing' both those who reside on the inside, and the outside.

After surveying these various crossroads of contemporary precariousness,<sup>16</sup> the crises of strategic intimacies<sup>17</sup> and the paralysis of endless reductionist calculi, in this work we will come to acknowledge how between the nightmares of history<sup>18</sup> and a technologically overdetermined and ecologically devastated future, an examination of civic life must start from *within* the throngs of devotees so mesmerized by the circulations of global finance. Out of a melange of conflicting paradigms, I look to two prevailing belief systems that underpin the most populous language-cultures of the internet; which both locate each other from the utmost periphery of one another; both have underlying *religious ideologies* that may aid in the acculturation of inclusive institutions which work to affirm the differences among their respective congregations.<sup>19</sup> Encountering a convergence from the utmost periphery from the other gives each perspective the potential to see how they are in a "constitutive relationship with (their) own outside," to question their own universality, as well as realizing the inadequacies that comes from within (Balibar, 36).

When *flatley* defined as the 'affective and habitual responses that accompany the sensation of these aporias', 'ritual' encapsulates these all-consuming political, economic and cultural trends as an *ontotheological* paradigm. Contrary to a history of scholarship which attempts to weave convergences by finding *surrogates* for a Christian 'god' within Confucian thought,<sup>20</sup> I find convergences instead by looking to the 'desecularizing spirit' of Confucianism, within Christianity. Aided by a historical account of the concept

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<sup>16</sup> See Standing, *The Precariat*, (2014).

<sup>17</sup> See Bloch, *Alexia. Sex, Love, and Migration* (2017).

<sup>18</sup> A renowned quote from James Joyce's literary alter ego in *Ulysses*: "History.. is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake" (Joyce, 42).

<sup>19</sup> See the concept of creating a 'planetary' perspective' suggested by authors like Paul Gilroy in *Between Camps* (1997) and Gayatri Spivak in *Death of a Discipline* (2003).

<sup>20</sup> "After decades of emphasis on rationality without proper knowledge or constant virtues, many contemporary scholars in China have considered the lack of the transcendent God as the main reason of Chinese cultural crisis" (Huang, 262).

of 'subjectivity', an interpretation of Christian Revelation through its own 'finitude' will provide an impediment for ending rituals that are either detrimental to 'terrestrial'<sup>21</sup> existence, which includes the present day trend of creating a Confucianism used as an ideological platform to aid in legitimizing absolutist forms of nationalism, as is a worry for the popular Confucianist scholar, Tu Weiming (1985).<sup>22</sup> A Confucian take on ritual will then provide the Christian-individualist-humanist perspective an impetus for taking up responsibilities which may have been initially perceived *as not being our own*. I end by *grounding* the reconstitutive potential that lies in the study of 'political and economic theology' (*oikonomia*) as a way of creating innovative yet salient ceremonies that are sensitive to distinguishing between the rituals that move us to take up responsibilities "for that which we do not deem ourselves to be responsible for" (Derrida 1978, 264), from those which cultivate instead absolutist or exclusionary forms of politics, apathetic disengagement, or the dismantlement of the public sphere altogether.

As the work of Clara Mucci (2013) and Peter Felix Kellermann (2007) demonstrate through scientific and clinical evidence, both living and deceased ancestors have a qualifying effect on our lived experiences. When 'Trauma' Studies encounters 'Post'-colonial<sup>23</sup> theory, a question arises regarding the possibility of conceiving a "decolonized trauma theory that attends to and accounts for the suffering of minority groups and non-Western cultures" (Andermahr 2015, 1). As if a continual endeavour to digest the egesta of history and climb out of seemingly endless wells, I see ritual as an 'ambiguous supplement' or *pharmakon*, interpreted as an attempt to process the raw experiences of sometimes continual, disparate, intersecting and overlapping layers of personal, historical and intergenerational burdens, but each working with varying levels of success. Rather than peering into an exotic other, I propose this omnipresent consideration of 'ritual' as a way of orienting ourselves within a shared *Realm of Hungry Ghosts* (2018), to aids in apprehending the breadth of the aporias that fuel the malaise of civilizational processes.

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<sup>21</sup> This terminology is employed by Bruno Latour in *Down To Earth* (2018) to characterize a move away from 'the global' in favor of a position more conducive to apprehending the voices of geology, nonhuman beings, as well as a symbolism that stresses the fragility of the earth.

<sup>22</sup> See John Makeham's *Lost Soul: "Confucianism" in Contemporary Chinese Academic Discourse* (2008, 36) for an explanation of these conflicting views.

<sup>23</sup> The term 'postcolonial' is also a sight of contestation since there is an implication that the study is subsequent to colonialism when in fact, the process is continuous and ongoing.

## Gut Feelings, Enclosed Landscapes

“What is heavy? so asketh the load-bearing spirit;  
then kneeleth it down like the camel,  
and wanteth to be well laden...” (Z, I).

Contemporary media ecologies reflect how a peculiar logic of economic, political and financial securitization seeps into our lives and shapes our subjectivities. Through a flattened and specifically *audiovisual* media, ‘camp mentalities’ are reinforced as we are enamored and entranced by spectacle. As when peering into the photogenic lives of others on Instagram or watching others enjoy themselves playing video games on Youtube, *feeling emotion* has become a “duty” fulfilled by others; like staged audiences that laugh on our behalf (Žižek 2008, 33):

The public becomes the phantom applause and laughter which accompanies American sit-coms; a reminder that this line was funny, that here we were supposed to laugh, cry or sigh.  
(Ullmann-Margalit, 277)

A *panopticonic* casino of software which is designed to turn us into addicts<sup>24</sup> is perhaps also ‘short-circuiting’ our neural pathways and attention spans.<sup>25</sup> An overabundance of contingent relationships paralyzes us within the *Paradox of Choice* (2016) while reinforcing the creation of overly-strategic *Cold Intimacies* (2007). Polarized echo-chambers ban disagreement and foster communities of confirmation-bias, creating ‘empathy gaps’ that hinders considerations of morality when engaging in any sort of social activity. Our devices are tailored to be more entertaining and engaging than the mundane conversations that sustain relationships at ‘dinner (political/civic) tables’ with the normal and uninteresting people that sit around us.<sup>262728</sup> The twin demons of marketing and

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<sup>24</sup> See Courtwright, *Age of Addiction* (2019).

<sup>25</sup> See Stiegler, *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations* (2010).

<sup>26</sup> Herbert Fingeret describes the Confucian perspectives surrounding eating ceremonies salient to bacterial and ritual analysis: “To serve and eat in the proper way, with the proper respect and appreciation, in the proper setting... is to transform the act of mere nourishment into the human ceremony of dining” (76).

<sup>27</sup> A line from an Ancient Chinese Poem by From Su Shi (苏轼) 和董傳留別, a Chinese calligrapher, gastronome, painter, pharmacologist, poet and politician, makes this connection between the mental and bodily nutrition, “粗糲大布裹生涯，腹有詩書氣自華” - which roughly translates to “those who are well read, will have a full belly.”

<sup>28</sup> See also Dryden, *Digestion, Habit, and Being at Home: Hegel and the Gut as Ambiguous Other* (2016).

propaganda, through their hypnotic rituals, may be eroding the sustained attention that democratic deliberation requires. If we cannot be relied upon to pay attention to even the mundane (and democratically inefficient), then perhaps democratic styles of governance which require civically engaged, politically and socially aware citizens, has become outmoded.<sup>29</sup>

Mcluhan's famous edict, explaining how "we shape our tools and our tools shape us, but it is equally true that we shape our tools according to our social and economic needs and desires" (Mcluhan, 78) rings true when we see how these aporias are catalyzed and reiterated by a media landscape compelled by the meticulous micromanagement of those who wish to implant narratives through data-driven marketing principles; or how the fate of bodies and minds are jeopardized through absolutist forms of governmentality. At the very least, this situation evokes a technological paranoia since our ability to sustain attention on that which provokes critical thought is becoming increasingly compromised and 'short-circuited'. This paranoia is akin to Socrates' warriness of how writing may "implant forgetfulness" found in Plato's *Phaedrus*, to which a similar tale echoes in the Egyptian Osiris myth. With UI principles designed to keep us perpetually 'engaged' and an artificial 'intelligence' that considers evermore variables into its consideration, perhaps this paranoia is well founded, as each one of us can attest to the hypnotic-trance evoked when using technology.

Alluding to Mcluhan's idea of a 'global village in the electronic age,' perhaps the evolution of internet culture is reanimating an ancient and tribalistic 'ontotheological' awareness regarding timeless questions about the purpose of our existence; the possible answers to which have considerable socio-political and economic consequences. In its formative years, surfing the internet meant scouring through thousands of unfinished projects, finding creativity for the sake of creativity, and being exposed to forms of self-expression that were popularized not necessarily because its creation was motivated as if it was an advertisement hoping to expand on a profit margin. Though it was hardly a site free from conflict, perhaps still weary from prior dotcom bubbles, the internet was not necessarily *structurally* instituted as being 'for-profit'. Indeed, while much of Amazon's success can be attributed to years of operating at a loss, this lack of revenue was the early criticism that the venture capitalists gave to founders of popular platforms like *Facebook*. With the rise of the Arab Spring and the Occupy Wall Street protests, or the various whistleblower revelations, there was a glimmer of hope that the internet could

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<sup>29</sup> See Harari, *Homo Deus* (2016).

provide a solid medium for democratic accountability - along with the ideals professed by proselytizers of Bitcoin in terms of financial accountability.

Gradually however, this social media revolution became another reflection of mainstream marketing.<sup>30</sup> With the benefit of hindsight, the advent of the Youtube channel “Lonelygirl15” was a harbinger for what Youtube, and indeed the internet itself, was soon to become, especially when compared to the benign ‘first video uploaded’ by the sites co-founder, Jawed Karim, talking about elephants. When it was first revealed that the heartfelt vlogger confessing the thoughts and feelings of her life was really a conglomerate of actors and writers working to produce a highly scripted show aimed at becoming popular and creating revenue, many fans responded with outrage. Soon however, this would become the new norm. Today there may be outrage over how Facebook tracks the movements of your mouse on the screen,<sup>31</sup> but tomorrow it becomes normalized, obvious and inevitable.

Meanwhile, vitriolic exchanges on social media have become another new norm and a subject of study.<sup>32</sup> Even before Trump’s presidency, American columnist Arthur Chu was compelled to compare the internet to a toilet, explaining how “we’ve created a dark, consequence-free place for libel, threats and harassment -- and no one feels responsible” (Chu, 2015). Again, this question of civic responsibility, from the culture of the internet through to taking up the burdens of ecological crises, remains unanswered. From the guise of streamlining and efficiency, the internet which once held hopes of becoming space for a diversity of potential, a technological sphere that was seemingly unbound to materialistic tethers, has become a giant series of clickfunnels,<sup>33</sup> reflecting a familiar ‘Las Vegas’<sup>34</sup> style marketplace disguised instead by rudimentary frameworks of community and effective design strategies. The distinctions between personal branding, art, meme and native advertisements would become increasingly obscured. And Google, which was once a relatively neutral gateway to the internet, has now given into an increasingly corporate agenda.

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<sup>30</sup> “We need to think very strategically about how to use social media – always remembering that, despite the egalitarianism claimed for social media by capital’s libidinal engineers, that this is currently an enemy territory, dedicated to the reproduction of capital” (Fisher 2018)

<sup>31</sup> See McNamee, *A Brief History of How Your Privacy Was Stolen* (2019).

<sup>32</sup> See Bishop, *Representations of ‘Trolls’ in Mass Media Communication* (2014).

<sup>33</sup> Though Senator Ted Stevens’ comment that the “Internet is a series of tubes” during a senate sub-committee meeting on Net neutrality has become a subject of internet mockery, the description is unwittingly appropriate. See Cliff, *The Internet is, in Fact, a Series of Tubes* (2011).

<sup>34</sup> Bloomberg, *Tristan Harris Says Tech Companies Have Opened Pandora’s Box* (2018).

Still, it is out of the contested space for reflection where one hand of academia is perhaps able to wash the other. Žižek, for example, critiques how “liberal multiculturalism” masks “an old barbarism with a human face” (Žižek, 2010) by reinforcing the importance of maintaining the particularity of cultures while simultaneously calling for universal education; a contradiction which manifests itself in the case of the whether the Roma should be subsumed into these universal education. In *History and Illusion in Politics* (2010) Raymond Geuss reiterates similar views by highlighting how modern socio-political establishments are confused ‘concomitants’ of several idealizations. Without even getting into the complications involved in their relationship to capitalism, Geuss meticulously argues how the various rationalizations behind concepts like the state, authority, legitimacy, liberalism, toleration, freedom, democracy, coercion and human rights, are conceptually incompatible. Though liberalism creates the fertile ground upon which the contradictions that sustain its own ideology (theology) can be critiqued, this potential also collapses unto itself when capitalism is seen as the root which sustains the whole project. Just as Nikki Johnson Huston explains, these unorganized amalgamations serve to reinforce the opinions of those who already have a voice, rather than allowing democratic expressions from those on the margins:

My problem with Liberalism is that it's more concerned with policing people's language and thoughts without requiring them to do anything to fix the problem. White liberal college students speak of “safe spaces”, “trigger words”, “microaggressions” and “white privilege” while not having to do anything or, more importantly, give up anything. (Huston 2017)

With the election of Donald Trump, the dreams of liberalism were finally forced to come face to face with a “cascade of unconscious feelings” (Choudhury, 36) and biases. The political effects of how our limbic fear responses systems, constantly scanning for threats in the environment, are prone to fire off when strangers are abound, which occur in spite of but also in addition to the endless “negative culturally-learned associations” (Choudhury et. al, 2014), had to be taken seriously. These *preconscious* factors contribute to how ethnicity (and/or nation) is becoming a “legitimate way of carving a niche in society” (Bauman, 107). What Shakil Choudhury finds in *Deep Diversity* (2015) is *that without regular and continued exposure to the other people and their differences, these biases can grow and reinforce themselves*, which is particularly a challenge in our time of increased social isolation.

From various different disciplines we find how a seemingly unending list of *preconscious* influences caution us to pay attention to even the most inconspicuous implicit biases, placebo effects and symbolic influences:<sup>35</sup> how reminders of identity affect how well students do on exams;<sup>36</sup> how a window onto nature may help patients heal;<sup>37,38</sup> how even slight changes to perceived facial expressions or how our own body posture can affect our mood;<sup>39</sup> or how, even through a qualified Sapir-Whorf hypotheses, language filters perception:

...warm temperatures make us temporarily friendlier and the color red causes us to perform more poorly on tests... drawing close dots on a Cartesian graph makes us feel more emotionally close to others and that résumés fastened to heavy clipboards make a better, more professional impression... clean smells, like that of Windex, promote cleaning behavior, while showering before a test is more likely to lead to cheating. (Lobel, 2)

Being attuned to these forces, again compels us to look beyond obvious forms of heterogeneity, and we become more sensitive to a *benign* homogeneity that pervades even the gradual alteration of how and what we are eating. For example, in *Healers and Empires in Global History* (2019), we find a discussion of how the staple diet of the new industrial proletariat was shipped from plantations in the Caribbean to permanently change the lives of even the most remote indigenous cultures: “Refined sugar was penetrating one indigenous cuisine after another, accompanying the ‘modernisation’ and ‘westernisation’”(Hokkanen, 41).<sup>40,41,42</sup> The devastating health consequences of a culture that normalizes sugar has been assiduously assessed by Robert Lustig’s famous lecture on *Sugar* (2019). Like a candy store that disguises the sameness of sugar within the benign addictions of endlessly colorful variations, we must realize that there is no going back to a ‘pure nature’ out of the ‘metamorphosis’ of industrialization, pollution and the diffusion of microplastics<sup>43</sup> in our whole

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<sup>35</sup> See Douglas, *Implicit Meanings: Selected Essays in Anthropology* (1999).

<sup>36</sup> See Nosek et al. *Pervasiveness and correlates of implicit attitudes and stereotypes* (2007).

<sup>37</sup> See Ulrich, *View Through a Window May Influence Recovery from Surgery* (1984).

<sup>38</sup> For more examples of the symbolic importance of space, see Laura McGrath and Paula Reavey's *The Handbook of Mental Health and Space* (2019).

<sup>39</sup> “Postural changes affect thoughts, emotions, and energy levels, and conversely, energy levels, emotions, and thoughts affect posture” (Peper et al. 2016).

<sup>40</sup> See Mintz, *Sweetness and Power the Place of Sugar in Modern History* (1986).

<sup>41</sup> The importance of diet is noted by James Whorton, “The mind matters too, as the functioning of the bowel is subject to the individual’s emotional state; ‘the gastrointestinal tract,’ a twentieth-century physician has observed, ‘is the primary battleground for the conflicts between the psyche and the soma” (cited in. Dryden, 2016).

<sup>42</sup> See “The Sugar You Stir” in *Without Guarantees: in Honour of Stuart Hall*, (Gilroy 2000, 126–133).

<sup>43</sup> “50% of the world population might have microplastics in their stools” (Hassan, 2019).

ecosystem. Along with Sara Ahmad's critical take on institutional diversity,<sup>44</sup> Mignolo voices similar concerns about how 'multiculturalism' evokes a "colonialist syndrome of cultural superiority and benign and condescending hospitality" (Mignolo, 58). As a mentality that destroys the social structures of anything that comes in contact with it, Mignolo views 'multiculturalism' as "a component part of the logic of neoliberalism and its project to pacify resistance, fragment movements, and bring the excluded into global capitalism's all-consuming framework and structure" (Mignolo, 57).

Though 'liberals' usually implicate 'traditionalists' in their instrumentalization of fear, as can be seen in works like *The Shock Doctrine* (2007) by Naomi Klein, there has also been a general disavowal of their own repressions that work in a similar manner. As Corey Robin alludes in his work on *Fear* (2018), the ideals of liberalism were never really immune from fear-based and "Malthusian" 0-sum games; liberal justifications of multiculturalism and heterogeneity may have been motivated by the same 'fear of the other' harnessed by divisive political figures, for "fear is not antithetical to reason... it thrives on an instrumental, cost-benefit analysis" (Robin 2006, 59). Robin views liberalism's ideals towards a multicultural openness as always having been a manifestation of a rationale intended to pacify a threatening other. Even if it has unwittingly done so, from behind its ignored contradictions liberal society has, in its own way, helped to cultivate these 'camp mentalities'.

Bringing relief to those anxieties, some politicians have been able to galvanize crowds in a way that 'liberals and intellectuals' have either failed or feared to address. Stirring up *ancient limbic responses*, 'strong men' prop up their flags as a way of fending off strangers and defend purities from being consumed by endless ambiguities. The purity of the woman's body, the purity of the nation and the purity of the ethnicity all need to be secured.<sup>45</sup> 'Foreigners' then find themselves between the whyms of global geopolitical struggles, and the insecurities of struggling 'democratically legitimized' empires:

"Governments impotent to strike at the roots of the existential insecurity and anxiety of their subjects are only too eager and happy to oblige. A united front among the 'immigrants', that fullest and most tangible embodiment of 'otherness', promises to come as near as conceivable to patching the diffuse assortment of fearful

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<sup>44</sup> See Ahmed, *On Being Included* (2012).

<sup>45</sup> See Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (2001).



and disoriented individuals together into something vaguely reminiscent of a 'national community' (Bauman, 109).

Perhaps our bodies are more familiar with the premises of the political economy than any constellation of ideas could ever hope to realize.<sup>4647</sup> Informed by Raymond Williams' *structures of feelings*,<sup>48</sup> I imagine that if we listen well to the dispersed clusters of voices<sup>49</sup> in this aporetic wasteland, 'our' body politic,<sup>50</sup> would hear how it is also becoming less and less satisfied. A collage of voices<sup>51</sup> expresses an unease from deep within our bowels and limbic system, and finds expression on the internet. These primordial reactions periodically erupt into directionless political movements; a revolt from the gut creates a "ritual arousal of ecstasy,"<sup>52</sup> as found in the occupy movement, the ubiquitous yellow vest marches in France, as well as Trump's rallies. If there is a "religious shape assumed by all the convictions of crowds" (Le Bon, 38), then perhaps it can be said that the contagious *effervescence*<sup>53</sup> evoked during the rituals of large crowds in sports stadiums, political protests or even national holidays can influence something akin to a 'collective subjectivity'.

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<sup>46</sup> "The health-conscious middle-class knows that when the body is fed certain things and given exercise, even though the exercise and the healthy food may go against one's inclination, the whole being does better in 'body and mood'" (Brennan, 159).

<sup>47</sup> "Rhythmic labor is highly spiritual... workers themselves give an altogether different reason for their preference for repetitive labor. They prefer it because it is mechanical and does not demand attention, so that while performing it they can think of something else" (Arendt 2018, 146).

<sup>48</sup> 'the categories which simultaneously organize the empirical consciousness of a particular social group and the imaginative world created by the writer' (Williams, 23).

<sup>49</sup> "it is not with rules based on theories of pure equity that they are to be led, but by seeking what produces an impression on them and what seduces them" (Le Bon, 21).

<sup>50</sup> In *Stasis* (2015), Agamben examines the book cover of Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, noting that "the Leviathan is literally the 'head' of a body political that is formed by the people of the subjects, which, as we have seen, has no body of its own, but exists only in the body of the sovereign. But this image derives directly from the Pauline conception, present in many passages of the Letters, according to which Christ is the head (kephalē) of the ekklēsia, that is, of the assembly of the faithful" and in anticipation to the work of desecralization, he says "If our hypothesis is correct, the image from the frontispiece presents the relation between the Leviathan and the subjects as the profane counterpart of the relation between Christ and the ekklēsia" (Agamben 2015, 62-63). Newman responds: "it is precisely this process of secularisation, in which sovereignty consolidates its autonomy by dividing itself from religious authority and by subordinating it to its own power, that is the central move of political theology" (Newman 2019, 86).

<sup>51</sup> T.S.Eliot's *The Wasteland* has often been interpreted as having been composed of a collage of voices. For a discussion, see Brooke et al. *Clustering Voices in The Waste Land* (2014) as they attempt to use computational methodologies to isolate these voices.

<sup>52</sup> "This may be mob mentality, workplace morale, or Durkheim's "ritual arousal of ecstasy"" (Brennan, 168n18).

<sup>53</sup> See Durkheim and Fields, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1996).

Trump does not hesitate when he says “my gut tells me more sometimes than anybody else’s brain can ever tell me” (Rucker, 2018). Politicians rise in their ranks by harnessing politically productive potential of these physiological, affective reactions. They attend to the experiences embedded in their “socially informed” bodies “with its tastes and distastes, its compulsions and repulsions” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 124). They listen for the groaning gut of our body politic<sup>54</sup> so as to predict and direct the course of these acute stress responses.<sup>55</sup> They “entrance the masses” through the “arousal and manipulation of age-old patterns of reaction” (Habermas 1990, 218-219) before they percolate into *uncontrollable* social dimensions.<sup>5657</sup>

The affective stream that connects the Fuhrer with his followers in the form of moral identification... is a function of a common awareness of mounting energies, growing violently into a state without measure or standard, which are accumulating and becoming available without limit in the person of the Fuhrer. (Bataille citd. Habermas 1990, 216).<sup>58</sup>

All that seems to remain when viewpoints and interests conflict is a ‘reductionism’ articulated by the political *science* of ‘realism’. This metanarrative rears its head even between democratic states in conflict. The 1956 Suez Crisis, typically viewed as the British Empire’s “last fling of the imperial dice” (Brown, 2001), where British concerns were trumped by those of the United States, serves as a twentieth century example of an ancient peering into the tensions involved between conflicting interests. Labeled as *Thucydides’ Trap*, conflict is always a possibility when ‘great powers’ threaten to displace one another, even amongst allies. This event can perhaps be seen as a major indicator of the ‘global’ unipolarity to come, in the guise of a Washington Consensus exporting “a policy trifecta of deregulation, free trade, and increased privatization” (Cummings & Shapiro, 2019). Realism in foreign policy incentivizes nations to project their version of ‘sovereignty’ outside their own borders.

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<sup>54</sup> See Protevi, *Political Affect* (2009).

<sup>55</sup> See Massumi, *Politics of Affect* (2016).

<sup>56</sup> See Fevre, *The Demoralization of Western Culture* (2000).

<sup>57</sup> “...the weak-willed person (those with *akrasia*, or ‘incontinence’) intellectually knows what is right. but powerful emotions (Vallie). such as *gut reactions* (thumos: e.g. .. anger) and sexual appetites. disturb the body ( 7 . 3 . 1 14 7a16); in such cases, feeling (pathos) overpowers the weak-willed person’s desire to do what intuition tells him is right ( 7.7 . 1 1 S 0b20-2 1)” (Protevi, 70).

<sup>58</sup> See Bataille, *Die psychologische Struktur des Faschismus* (1978).

Unlike in feudal societies, where the ruling authority's ability to control its population would disperse outward from a central citadel, the extremes of unadorned authority in contemporary renditions of the Westphalian state can be found on the borders at the periphery of their jurisdictions instead. Developed after the Thirty Years' War with the *Treaties of Westphalia* in 1648, the 'Westphalian state' is an idea of 'sovereignty' where (European) states would possess a 'monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within their mutually recognized territories' (Weber 2004, 33). This form of governance would become as far reaching as the World Wars and would fundamentally transform the social structures of many soon-to-be nations. For example, societies in the middle east, which were historically tolerant and had their own institutions for negotiating with the nomadic tribes that would move in and out of their jurisdictions, were soon thrown into wholly novel negotiations of dominance with regards to more centralized forms of political association. Centralization is a necessity since every neighboring power has also acquired this form of governance, and they may use their newly found political might against us. Comparable narratives can be found throughout the "world" but we can also point to how, on the African continent, histories of sociopolitical and cultural dynamics were confronted with attempts towards centralizing authority and implanting the paradigm of geographic borders.<sup>59</sup>

This Westphalian ideal became most palpable for me from behind a chained fence while volunteering in a refugee camp, where I became a witness to how two state leaders met to discussions that no one else was purvey to in the middle of a 'no-man's-land'<sup>60</sup> between the borders of Serbia and Bulgaria. Hearing the musings of *Balkan Ghosts*<sup>61</sup> from the locals reminiscing about similar migration crises during the Yugoslav wars became another iteration of a *particular* reach towards the universal; another opening that allowed me to peer into, and distinguish between, the ruptures of disparate, intersecting and overlapping layers of personal, historical and intergenerational wounds.<sup>62</sup> The most exterior symbolic location of political influence in modern times, as a "novel form of political administration, population management, warfare, and coerced labor" (Gilroy, 60), had become encapsulated by terms like "refugee camps," "detention centers" or most ominously, "(re-)education centers". Such

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<sup>59</sup> See Benhabib, *Exile, Statelessness, and Migration* (2018) for a discussion of both the "Westphalian" governance (21) as well as the exporting of so-called "paradigm wielders" (163).

<sup>60</sup> In the section entitled "No Man's Land" in *Negative Dialectics* (2004), Adorno notes: "Tendentally, philosophy becomes a ritualistic posture. Yet there is a truth stirring in that posture as well: the truth of philosophy falling silent" (77).

<sup>61</sup> See Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute* (2009).

<sup>62</sup> "Universal fictions operate on our sensibilities; they have an aesthetic power, affecting our senses, driving our emotions and desires." (Mignolo, 187)

formations at the environs of modern societies are the epitome of how state administrators decide the fate of bodies; one does not need to go to Guantanamo to confront “nothing but pure life, without any mediation” (Agamben 1998, 171), for the ‘camp’ is the epicenter of *Nomos*, the ‘state of exception’.

In the *Embattled Public Sphere* (1997), Seyla Benhabib extrapolates from the ideas of Habermas, Hannah Arendt and John Rawls in order to characterize this *aporic* ‘state of exception’ as a fundamentally problematic rift that separates various approaches to account for and engage with what is called a ‘public sphere’ or ‘civil society’ with viewpoints that, for example, simply *refuse to participate in good faith*. Zygmunt Bauman describes this as a *pathology* in *Liquid Modernity* (2000):

Pathology it may well be, but this is not a pathology of the mind trying in vain to force sense upon a world devoid of stable and trustworthy meaning, but a pathology of public space resulting in a pathology of politics: the wilting and waning of the art of dialogue and negotiation, the substitution of the techniques of escape and elision for engagement and mutual commitment. (Bauman, 109)

While Benhabib comes to the following harrowing conclusion:

...even after we engage in such processes of actual or virtual reasoning and dialogue, it is unlikely that we will have eliminated our differences, our clash of values and beliefs, the disparity among our deeply held convictions. Perhaps the very concept of the public sphere reeks of rationalist idealism: it seems to presuppose transparent selves who can know themselves and each other. At this point we can see that postmodernist skeptics, like Jean-François Lyotard who question any method of universalisability, interest-group liberals who think that politics essentially is about bargaining on goods, some commensurable and some not, and advocates of ‘the politics of phenomenological positionality’ will join hands. (Benhabib, 15)

The citizens of complex democracies have an enormous work of institutional translation to do... reflexivity about one's own value positions; the capacity to distance oneself from one's convictions and entertain them from the perspective of others; the ability to live with religious, ethical, and aesthetic incommensurables; the equanimity to accept the multiplicity of values and the clash of the

gods in a disenchanted universe... undoubtedly a task at which individuals and nations will often fail. (Benhabib, 17)

The weakness is that civic participation (Hegelian, *Volksgeist*) presupposes an “obligation to reverse perspectives” which, because of its “epistemic dimension... already implicit in the Kantian moral principle to act in such a way that the maxim of one’s actions could be a universal law for all,” reveals an “aporia” that lies behind what the ‘public sphere’ needs to assume in order to exist (Benhabib, 14).

Throughout his works, Adorno draws attention to the limitations of this Kantian moral imperative to act with universality in mind when considering how during the Holocaust a “destructive drive” had become “entirely indifferent” about whether it had been “directed at others or against its own subject” (Adorno 2005, 104). For Adorno, acting with a moral maxim of universality implodes when, perhaps through a feeling like *resentment* or a calculative logic of a reductionist form of Darwinism, self-destruction itself becomes a primary export:

The law to promote other people’s happiness does thus not spring from the premise that this is an object for everyone’s license; its source is simply that the form of universality — which reason needs as a condition for investing a maxim of self-love with the objective validity of a law—comes to be the determining cause of the will. (Adorno 2004, 259)

With a rationale about how increasing population levels lead to increasing food scarcity, Thomas Malthus is said to have influenced the work of Charles Darwin. Yet, if we take seriously the role of cultural contexts, both these thinkers are products of their Victorian times.<sup>63</sup> Within this backdrop, they developed theories that help acculturate politicized forms of the ‘natural’ life. This particular reading of Darwin *elicits* the same kinds of biases towards the *survivalist* appetites for securitization needed for rationalizing the replacement of “self organizing markets with centrally planned corporate economies, and the replacing of diverse cultures with cultures of greed and materialism” (Cavanagh, 22) - perhaps this formulation is a useful designation for the term ‘neoliberalism’.

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<sup>63</sup> “As any number of radical theorists from Brecht through to Foucault and Badiou have maintained, emancipatory politics must always destroy the appearance of a ‘natural order’, must reveal what is presented as necessary and inevitable to be a mere contingency, just as it must make what was previously deemed to be impossible seem attainable” (Fisher 2010, 17).

The Second World War again brought these questions of social darwinism to the fore. While serving to exemplify how the absurdly rational may not necessarily lead to a purely *economic* scientism, the war threw German identity into a *double crises*. First, the question was asked about what it meant to be German after an identity was so integrally tied to 'the other'. The second question was about why the decision was made to intensify the operations of the death camps, even though it would have diverted resources from the war effort. Arendt attempted to *comprehend* leaders like Eichmann as having an "inability to think, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else" (Arendt 1994, 49). Yet, her contentions regarding the 'banality of evil' does not bode well in light of later research. From a Nazi rational, the new general understanding had become that "the death camps were applied science" (Fevre, 35). For example, by focusing on killers who had the opportunity to say 'no,' Daniel Goldhagen dispels all notions that paint Germans as being ignorant to the plight of the Jews, and that those who were committing these acts of murder, did so reluctantly:

...that matters of economy would not dictate German "rationality" in their treatment of Jews. Economic self-injury generally worried or deterred neither Hitler nor the lowliest camp guard. (Goldhagen 311).

Though the Holocaust is seen as a 'failure of humanity,' there is debate about whether such an event is 'exceptional' since justifications given for the atrocities did not differ greatly from a discourse of utility that existed prior, as was the case for legitimizing the destruction of the Hereros People (Gilroy 1997, 42) or in the Ottoman or British Empires, as Michael Rothberg explains in *Multidirectional Memory* (2009):

It is difficult to grasp how the elimination of one "alien" presence is more irrational than the other... The establishment of pragmatism and utility as standards of historical distinction in this instance presupposes European frameworks of evaluation.<sup>64</sup> (Rothberg, 50)

How a simple common sense logic for utility can reach such unfathomable conclusions perhaps drives our insatiable need to *comprehend* such collective trauma. How Arendt permits herself to only *impersonate* the "manifest shallowness" (Arendt 1981, 4) of totalitarianism, while insisting in her works of the

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<sup>64</sup> The fissures between faculties reiterates these apporias: "A common critical response to the privileging of the Holocaust is to claim uniqueness or primacy for other histories of suffering, such as African American slavery or the genocide of the Native Americans. While such efforts have helped raise the profile of these relatively neglected histories, they are historically problematic as well as politically and ethically unproductive" (Craps, 83).

“non-utilitarian values” that motivate the destruction that took place, exemplifies this unfathomability (Rothberg, 51).

An admonishment from Henri Bergson will work to sharpen this guilt with regards this failure of humanity:

...following the indications of speech, will doubtless define feelings by the things with which they are associated; love for one's family, love for one's country, love of mankind, it will see in these three inclinations one single feeling, growing ever larger, to embrace an increasing number of persons. (citd. Ansell-Pearson, 313)

What Bergson sees as an “intellectualist” oversight may have been what had contributed to the clouding of Arendt's judgment, rendering her unable to take seriously the *simple* steps that were taken in order to reach logical, totalitarian conclusions. This oversight is one that sees cosmopolitanism as a clear extension of nationalism, when in reality, they could very well be two incommensurable concepts that have failed to reach any sort of reconciliation.<sup>65</sup> Bergson explains that the mistake lies in a conflation between what we presume to be a difference in degree, in terms of the size of the community we choose to take responsibility for, with what may actually be a difference in kind. Cosmopolitanism requires an *extra intellectualist effort* that does not actually affectively resonate with ‘the masses’. So a conflict emerges between these liberal-minded ‘cosmopolitan’ intellectuals and those that prefer nationalism and/or ethnicity, who label such intellectuals as advocating ‘globalism’. In explaining how the cultural idiom of “don't talk to strangers” has become “the strategic precept of adult normality,” (104) Bauman concurs with Bergman's healthy skepticism towards the view that “communitarianism is a rational response to the genuine crisis of ‘public space’” (Bauman, 108). As Germany in the Second World War came to exemplify, through its own fundamentalism, sometimes the metanarrative that remains the most credible between conflicting paradigms fuels an absolutism that takes the form of defending an ethnicity or a nation.

In the field of international relations, this ‘state of exception’ comes out of an anarchic world which lacks any supreme sovereign authority. China's recent global reach through economic and military expansion, while serving as the ultimate counterexample to the liberal coupling of economic growth and political freedom, connects concerns of foreign policy with local-level questions of civic participation. Ruiping Fan's *Renaissance of Confucianism in Contemporary China* (2011) reminds us of these rifts:

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<sup>65</sup> See Lefebvre (2012, 41) for a discussion regarding Bergson responding to Durkheim.

Many in the West are so fully embedded in their moral and political understandings that they take for granted that their moral intuitions reflect a global moral and political theoretical common ground... In different ways such presuppositions sustain the ideologies of such diverse parties as social democrats and neo-conservatives. The universality of these assumptions is radically falsified by China, which constitutes a moral, social and political counter-example... China and her culture are nested in a life world with a moral and political thought style substantively different from that of the West. (Fan, 1)

Though critiques of orientalism have increased sensitivities about exporting Eurocentric ideas, these two frames of reference are *still* stranded in the same aporias existing between colonial histories, looming ecological crises, and the confusion of “thousands of simultaneous and contesting paradigms” (Macfarlane, 69).

While the contested history of the museum was perhaps supposed to serve as another space of liberal reflection and civic education, it instead reaches another aporetic impasse when museum directors complain about the stealing of antiques by Chinese efforts. These complaints fall on deaf ears when there is a reminder that much of these valuables were acquired through colonial plunder in the first place.<sup>6667</sup> Likewise, educational institutions are in a similar bind as they ask “how academic presses can simultaneously engage with China and maintain their integrity” given the attempt of Chinese authorities to create “sanitized versions of top academic journals:”

Facing intense criticism for caving to censors, Cambridge University Press restores access to more than 300 journal articles it had blocked in China - but the problem for publishers isn't going away.

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<sup>66</sup> “European countries and their museums should be prepared for more ex-colonial nations around the world to demand the return of stolen goods. And to begin to let go of their colonial past — literally” (Attiah, 2019).

<sup>67</sup> “the crisis that Europe is going through—as should be evident in the dismantling of its university institutions and in the growing museification of culture—is not an economic problem (“economy” today is a shibboleth and not a concept) but a crisis of the relationship with the past. Since obviously the only place in which the past can live is the present, if the present is no longer aware of its past as living, then universities and museums become problematic places. And if art has today become for us an eminent figure—perhaps the eminent figure—of this past, then the question that we must never stop posing is: what is the place of art in the present?” (Agamben 2019, XXX)



Chinese authorities also try to block articles from another journal. (Redden, 2017)<sup>68</sup>

While in English, the word 'censorship' implies something like a *suppression* of information, the Chinese implication is more akin to a *supervision*, a 'legalistic review system'. Perhaps, President Obama's warnings in his January 2010 State of the Union address is a precursor for the need to implement similar supervision systems:

...last week the Supreme Court reversed a century of law that I believe will open the floodgates for special interests – including foreign corporations – to spend without limit in our elections. I don't think American elections should be bankrolled by America's most powerful interests, or worse, by foreign entities. They should be decided by the American people. And I'd urge Democrats and Republicans to pass a bill that helps to correct some of these problems. (Obama, 2010)

Years later, the American people had become exposed to a plethora of issues related to such incursions into social media platforms:

Macedonian teenagers create sensational and false content to profit from online ad sales. Disinformation experts plan rallies and counterrallies, calling Americans into the streets to scream at each other. Botnets amplify posts and hashtags, building the appearance of momentum behind online campaigns like #releasethememo... . We become aware of how uncomfortable this model is when Steve Bannon<sup>69</sup> and Cambridge Analytica develop personality profiles of us so they can tailor persuasive messages to our specific personal quirks, but that's exactly what any competent advertiser is doing, every day, on nearly every site online. (Zuckerman, 2018)

Nikola Spasov, the Balkan representative for Cambridge Analytica then demonstrates the complications involved in dichotomous views of whether sovereignty operates from an 'outside or inside,' as well as the line between 'legality and illegality,' by stating:

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<sup>68</sup> @chinaquarterly, "China Quarterly Editor's statement: Cambridge University Press to unblock censored material today" (2017).

<sup>69</sup> In an opening lecture about "Posthuman Knowledge," Rosi Braidotti's comments about the insidious attempts of people like Steve Bannon to replace Pope Francis (Harvard GSD, 2019) - affirming the notion of 'civil war' that we will encounter in this work.

Absolutely no illegal methods were used in those campaigns; on the contrary, they were conducted professionally, according to top world standards, using advanced research and communication tools. (Apostolov, 2018)

Just as museums seem to be in no position to point out wrongdoing, by increasingly operating as if it was a corporation (not to mention having a history of unjustified interventionism in countries like Iran and Nicaragua), 'Western' governments themselves seem to have historically *sold off* their 'moral authority' when it comes to attempting to regulate such activity through "the rise of a highly organized private sector and its institutionalized participation in policymaking" (citd. Dallmayr et al., 181). This is well illustrated when we compare the work of Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, who discuss the political and economic evolution of Venice during the Middle ages in *Why Nations Fail* (2012) with Michael J. Graetz and Ian Shapiro's meticulous investigation into the history of how the United States' Estate Tax was repealed in 2001 in their *Death by a Thousand Cuts* (2006). As part of a broader "Republican antitax crusade," this repeal was one of multiple campaigns "to reduce the size and functions of American government" (Graetz & Shapiro, 9) - in the dedication of their work to Boris I. Bittker, "Whose writings on the estate tax almost cost him tenure" Graetz & Shapiro reiterate Niel Postman's comments about the difficulty of assuming neutrality for there is an elite class actively engaging in their own version of Academic regulation, even in the 'land of the free'. These works show how, though it may be possible to assume that the maintenance of 'inclusive institutions' were foundational to the economic prosperity of both the United States and Venice (as opposed to more hierarchical institutions like private schools and gated communities in neighborhoods with even moderate levels of income), there is always a tangible temptation to actively *enclose* avenues towards social mobility from those who have already achieved positions of privilege:

Economic growth supported by the inclusive Venetian institutions was accompanied by creative destruction. Each new wave of enterprising young men who became rich via the commenda or other similar economic institutions tended to reduce the profits and economic success of established elites. And they did not just reduce their profits; they also challenged their political power. Thus there was always a temptation, if they could get away with it, for the existing elites sitting in the Great Council to close down the system to these new people. (Acemoglu & Robinson, 155-156)

Long term socioeconomic and political factionalism can also be found in Shapiro's *Political Representation* (2015) with discussions about both overt and benign forms of racial segregation. Practices of "red-lining" which lowered "down-payments and interest rates" while giving "loan-guarantees to white home buyers on the condition that their homes be sited in racially exclusive enclaves" (Shapiro 2015, 123) again illustrate these barriers. Such 'restrictive covenants,' upheld by a 1948 Supreme Court Ruling then and would see various 'implicit' reiterations through to the present, would read as follows:

None of the said lands, interests therein or improvements thereon shall be sold, resold, conveyed, leased, rented to or in any way used, occupied or aquired by any person of Negro blood or to any person of the semitic race, blood, or origin which racial description shall be deemed to include Armenians, Jews, Hebrews, Persians or Syrian.  
(Scrapbook of an American Community)

With all these incursions into 'inclusive' 'democratic' processes, of which there can be countless other examples, in *The State of Democratic Theory* (2006), Shapiro joins Žižek and Geuss in questioning the plausibility of liberal-civic ideals by highlighting how the popular notion that everyone should be 'given a voice' can itself become a source which can obstruct "procrastinate and stonewall, preventing change" (Shapiro 2006, 81). He cites Rousseau to explain how he "argued long ago that allegiance to "sectional societies" is more likely to undermine than reinforce commitment to collective institutions" (Shapiro 2006, 92). Using the implications of findings in 'relative deprivation theory', where people compare themselves relative to proximity rather than to an absolute - choosing, for example, to have the best home in a less attractive neighborhood than to have the worst home in the better area - Shapiro describes how there is a "reluctance to identify with disadvantaged groups" (Shapiro 2006, 123). How different classes choose to identify has innumerable political consequences:

If they compare themselves to the owner (as Marx hoped they would), they will conclude that his relative share of the surplus has increased more than theirs, and they will regard themselves as worse-off—hence more exploited. If, however, their comparative point of reference is the five fired employees, then they will see themselves as better-off. (Shapiro 2006, 119)

With these analyses, Shapiro is able to pinpoint a question which is the main endeavor of our project here. For Shapiro, though it can be said that democratic societies rely upon “large publicly committed civic institutions” it is also “not obvious how to differentiate the Boy Scouts from the Hitler Youth on that count” (Shapiro 2006, 93). Shapiro does however provide at least one factor to look out for when differentiating between the two:

The goal should be to reshape such constraints, where possible, so that at the margins identities evolve in ways that are more, rather than less, hospitable to democratic politics. (Shapiro 2006, 95)

For the first time, a large-scale movement no longer claims to address geopolitical realities seriously, but purports to put itself explicitly outside of all worldly constraints, literally offshore, like a tax haven. (Latour, 36)

In *Down to Earth* (2018), Bruno Latour attempts to lay the groundwork for an appeal to our collective responsibilities by discussing the demands/questions asked of ‘us’ by an ecological crises which is perhaps *the only universal paradigm* as “all forms of belonging are undergoing metamorphosis” (Latour, 15, emphasis added). Thinking about how “we are also experiencing a regression of our civic bonds and political ties, a breakdown of the trust that used to unify us” (37), Braidotti (2019) reiterates such concerns about defamiliarization and renegotiation; explaining how “we need to negotiate who ‘we’ are” (Braidotti, 38) and “we are indeed in this epistemic reshuffle together” (70). Speaking particularly with regards to the technological shifts of artificial intelligence and biological manipulation in *Morphing Intelligence* (2019), Catherine Malabou asks “Do these metamorphoses amount to so many liberating transformations? Or do they signify a process of intensified despiritualization or desymbolization?” (Malabou 2019, 16).

Another example of the inevitability of starting from a flattened, homogeneous yet unifying perspective, can be found in Mignolo’s description of *Decoloniality* (2018) as an “epistemic reconstitution” that assumes more than the socio-political and economic forms of domination usually discussed in conversations about coloniality but which also addresses “the cultural aspects and, of course, the epistemic and hermeneutical principles upon which Western religions, science, and philosophy were built” (Mignolo, 166-168). Perhaps it can be said that, sparking the imagination of the creation of a ‘global’ time and space through circumnavigating the globe and proselytizing the standardization of a Gregorian calendar - where Derrida’s term,

“mondialatinization” refers here to *globalatinization*,<sup>70</sup> Colonialism itself was a primary global epistemic reconstitution. Whereas for Malabou, viewpoints are “prior experiences crystallized into habits” (103), for Mignolo, “the habits (of) modernity/coloniality (are) implanted in all of us,” (Mignolo, 4).

A terrifyingly unfathomable aspect of the Atomic bombs in Japan was how soundless of a phenomena it actually was. How a city could just disappear was beyond comprehension for a baffled high command who were unaware of any air raids. With all communications cut, the realization came only after the fact, when a reconnaissance plane reported back the destruction that had taken place. In *Hyperobjects* (2014), Timothy Morton draws a parallel between the unfathomability of the losses consummated by such weapons of mass destruction with the disappearances forewarned by climate science. Seeing both ‘events’ as perhaps being beyond the capability of human comprehension and control, Morton attempts to *tune our senses* to the slight discomforts that protrude from various peripheral perspectives of normality in order to heighten our senses to any possible ‘reality’; exemplified by that gulp of anxiety experienced while trying to maintain the niceties of routine conversation about the weather with a stranger on the bench of a public park (Morton, 99).

Similar parallels and attempts to attune the senses can be found in *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007) where Karen Barad contends with the moral dimensions of scientific discovery, particularly with regards to the creation of the atomic bomb - useful contemplations for framing contemporary ethical considerations like that of genomics and artificial ‘intelligence’. In *The Mark of the Sacred* (2013) Jean-Pierre Dupuy also contends with such unfathomability as he assesses how contemporary disenchantment desensitizes and thrusts us further into an abyss, where nuclear and ecological apocalypse become disturbing but apt examples for one another. All three authors employ a serious play with metaphor with what Žižek and Benjamin refer to as “Messianic” or “Paulinian” time:

...apocalyptic time is precisely the time of such an indefinite postponement, the time of freeze in-between two deaths: in some sense, we are already dead, since the catastrophe is already here, casting its shadow from the future—after Hiroshima, we can no longer play the simple humanist game of insisting that we have a choice (“It depends on us whether we follow the path of self-destruction or the path of gradual healing”); once such a

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<sup>70</sup> See the section entitled “Faith and Knowledge” in Derrida’s *Acts of Religion* (2001).

catastrophe has happened, we lose the innocence of such a position, we can only (indefinitely, maybe) postpone its reoccurrence. (Žižek 2012, 703)

As if having 'already fallen' into the abyss (Morton, 160), while being unaware of the echoing, earlier warnings, like Bill McKibben's *The End of Nature* (2006) and Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1994), we seem to have past an event horizon; perhaps we are merely reiterating a denial about an ecological apocalypse that has already rendered us nonexistent.

Many, if not most, business executives and political leaders today understand that radical changes in our way of life are the price that must be paid for avoiding disaster; but because this price—amounting to a renunciation of “progress”—seems to them exorbitant, they inevitably succumb to what the philosopher Günther Anders called “blindness” toward the Apocalypse. (Dupuy, 27)

Whereas these thinkers view this 'blindness' in terms of an insensitivity and disenchantment, Latour extends this idea by locating this incomprehension with an almost conspiratorial<sup>71</sup> sounding culpability and betrayal by “obscurantist elites,” seemingly confirmed by the studies of Ian Shapiro:

Climate research has been a victim of a disturbing phenomenon: the use of advanced marketing techniques to discredit scientific findings that may lead to consumer and regulatory behavior unfavorable to certain business interests. (Emanuel, 61)

For Latour, these intentions became most visible on June 1st, 2017 when Donald Trump withdrew from the climate accord. As if proclaiming “We Americans don't belong to the same earth as you. Yours may be threatened; ours won't be!” (Latour, 2), Trump issued a declaration of war “authorizing the occupation of all the other countries, if not with troops, at least with CO<sub>2</sub>, which America retains the right to emit” (Latour, 84). A historic laughter, like the one given by world leaders during Trump's speech at the United Nation,<sup>72</sup> seems like an adequate response to the many ways in which the era of Trump has unveiled

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<sup>71</sup> In *Witches, Terrorists, and the Biopolitics of the Camp* (2018), Cynthia Barounis explains how an 'affective turn' perhaps asks us to supplement “our paranoid models with reparative ones” (217) before concluding that “Sometimes what looks like paranoia may simply be a matter of having learned to see what is right in front of you” (235).

<sup>72</sup> “Trump Boast Gets Laugh at UN.” (Associated Press, 2018)

the 'camp' that lies at the heart of societies. An equally condemning conclusion has been reached by a former US Advisor on climate change, Gus Speth, who locates the problem of inaction not just in the realm of ignorance, or within the canonical understanding of incentives, but retains spiritual depravity:

I used to think that top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change. I thought that thirty years of good science could address these problems. I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy, and to deal with these we need a cultural and spiritual transformation. And we scientists don't know how to do that.  
(Gus Speth, in Crockett 2014)

Reminiscent to a fear of photography for stealing souls, the symbolic image of the 'globe' through the image of the 'pale blue dot' had a double effect of both humbling us in the presence of a universe while also working to validate our "presence within modernity" (Peffer, 16). This imagery is what Latour is responding to when he explains that 'we have never been modern'. Instead, he invites us to reconceptualize the indestructible rock of "the globe" as a thin and relatively fragile terrestrial layer. Latour describes how this 'extraterrestrial point of view' regulates the actions of some influential role models on this earth to resonate more with a hopeless renouncing of responsibility (Latour, 88). In building walls, erecting "gilded fortresses" (Latour, 14), filibustering political processes, gerrymandering, researching rockets to Mars and attempting to "teleport themselves into computers" (Latour, 30), some seem to be preparing for evacuations to survive an already inevitable, apocalyptic climate apertied.

Like how rich land holders would stoke racism as a means of maintaining their positions in society during the earlier years of the United States, rehashing age old playbooks to prepare for an oncoming climate apartheid seems like an adequate strategy. Latour analogizes *the Titanic* to describe how a ruling class, who being the first to know that the ship is sinking, "reserve the lifeboats for themselves and ask the orchestra to go on playing lullabies so they can take advantage of the darkness to beat their retreat before the ship's increased listing alerts the other classes!" (Latour, 18). Where ancient leaders were mythologized to *lead* armies into battle, the influential people of contemporary life make decisions *from behind*. The rituals evoked by rising the ranks of 'our' "secular religions"<sup>73</sup>, cultivate an insatiable economic vigilance and

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<sup>73</sup> Both Emilio Gentile's *Politics as Religion* (2006) & Saul Newman's *Political Theology* (2019) thoroughly assess various renditions of this concept which we will employ later in this text.

insecurity avoidant type of rationality (the most apt illumination of which became disclosed through the Panama Papers leak which confirmed the untraceable expanses of tax fraud that envelopes 'global' economics) that reinforces the ruminations of desperation which our economic system already rewards while also building bunkers that keep themselves safe from any lines of fire and potential uprisings.

Perhaps if 'we' wish to cultivate a critical orientation to the sensibility of belonging on this earth, we may follow Žižek's suggestion of the landfill (and the *voids* found in toilets) to be an appropriate point of inspiration.<sup>74</sup> (Taylor 2009, 162); By starting from the post-apocalyptic and messianic time, from the farthest point of conceivability, from an imagination that is completely peripheral from 'our' habituations yet simultaneously and totally within the bounds of the fate of civilizations, we can be attuned to what Karen Bray describes as a call<sup>75</sup> to resist "the anti-earth ideologies and theologies that are devouring us" (Bray, 129), for claims of universality are at best *useful fictions*.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> See Marshall, *Behavior, Belonging, and Belief* (2002).

<sup>75</sup> I refer to a "call" in a sense evoked through Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, (2017) as well as Avital Ronell's *The Telephone Book*, (1989).

<sup>76</sup> Mignolo discusses the methodology of taking up "universal fictions" (187) which are described as being "effective fictions" (195) and not claims to truth "without parentheses" (115); an apt example of such an attempt is found in Frantz Fanon's reach towards a potential universality from his own position of particularity, when taking up the master's tool of *nationalism*.



## Some Crises, Different Contexts

“Every flag that flies today is a cry of pain”  
- *An Atlas of the Difficult World* (Rich, 23)

Before turning to examine what Athens and Jerusalem can learn from the insights brought forth from Chinese *praxis*, I will first turn to the ideas of revolution, and later revelation, that Western thought has been *exporting* to the ‘East’. We start with the term ‘crisis’ which alludes to a platonic *turning point*; apprehended etymologically, the greek *krisis* is “a moment of objective contradiction yet subjective intervention” (Spivak 1999, 323). Whereas, from the perspective of Chinese-Confucianism, an identity cannot be based on a moment of *revelation* as “transformation takes place not as a series of events or eruptions, but discreetly, imperceptibly, and continually” (Han, Locations 50-51), just as outside geo-political realities and political fissures once fueled socio-political revolutions in China in which the need for Confucian ideals were put under question, perhaps it would make sense to learn from what ‘Western thought’ has to say regarding this reflexivity. As those living with constant pollution in China know well, ecological questions have also brought us to an unprecedented, global *tipping point*. However, Byung-Chul Han’s analysis of turning points misses a crucial hidden implication to this idea of ‘revolution’ since the term also has an implication for *returning to a primary stasis* that is, as we will see, much closer to the ideals of Confucianism.

In China, as well as much of the world, it is easy to find skepticism towards efforts to value the “multiplicity of institutional configurations” (Benhabib, 17) as well as the embrace of any processes “of articulating good reasons” (Benhabib, 19) within the public sphere. This skepticism is also supported by the periodic rise of populist and authoritarian styles of governance around the world, as well as the factionalism within democracies that allows for the ascent of those with the most callous forms of influence to positions of governance; to such an extent that even Francis Fukuyama has raised concerns about the future of democratic norms.<sup>77</sup> The logic of the market which was formerly seen to be an ally of the public sphere, has now become one of at least two absolutist responses to the pair of blindspots that haunt the potential democratic value that a ‘civic space’, or a ‘public sphere’ may enculture, from the two sources of incommensurability and bad faith:

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<sup>77</sup> See Tharoor, (2017).

...the underlying assumption here is that the existing variety of political systems is not the result of equally valid but competing claims to truth, but of a rejection of truth in favor of power, resulting in the proliferation of self-interested groups that use a predatory violence to enforce their domination over others. (Pan, 47)

This limitation of imagination is how Slavoy Žižek reworks Fukuyama's notion of the "death of history" to be more precise: "It thus seems that Fukuyama's utopia of the 1990's had to die twice, since the collapse of the liberal-democratic political utopia on 9/11 did not affect the economic utopia of "global" market capitalism" (Žižek *First as Tragedy*, 5). That is, the liberal version of the 'end of history' had not silenced the sentiment which is aptly characterized below:

Dear Mr. Macfarlane,

My observation is that our generation lives in a world of confusion and paradoxes. In China, this is an era of materialism, an era without faith... After the Cultural Revolution, which COMPLETELY destroyed traditional Chinese culture, Chinese people found it hard to adjust to the new realities. I don't think the rampant materialism in our generation is completely our fault. After all, what else can we believe? Party doctrines? Western liberalism? Love? Justice? Kindness? After the ebbing away of revolutionary frenzy, many Chinese discovered that the power of money is the most concrete and the "safest" thing to believe in. (Macfarlane, 4-5)

This sentiment, which seems to accrue validity with every variation of its utterance, is reiterated by Paulos Huang in *Confronting Confucian Understandings of the Christian Doctrine of Salvation* (2009):

...China is facing a crisis of faith and morality, after 30 years fast material development, the Chinese government is now considering the reconstruction of the value system as a vital essential strategy to unite the whole nation. (Huang, 30)

China has become the epitomic counterexample to the liberal idea that economic and political freedom are tied. As such, across the earth there is a growing temptation to idolize particular culturally licensed absolutist systems; whether through an unwavering support of the invisible hands of economic

logic encapsulated by today's "reign of technics" (Newman 2019, 132),<sup>78</sup> through a "dictatorship of reason"<sup>79</sup> where every instance of contemporary life becomes a matter of calculation or through certain leaders that can at least convey authority, if not expertise.<sup>80</sup> Each possibility reinforces itself through a series of self-fulfilling prophecies; creating 'rituals' of verification,<sup>81</sup> 'sites of veridiction'<sup>82</sup> where truth and value become more easily recognizable, especially when contrasted to the unreliability and inefficiencies associated with the aporias confronted through the "obligation to reverse perspectives" that democratically sensitive apparatuses necessitate.

This lack of imagination is reiterated when Habermas, in *Postmetaphysical Thinking II* (2017), discusses how modern religions, or for that matter any type of idealisms, are forced to reckon with calculative technical and economic logic that either "withdraws from the world" (Habermas 2017, 61), or subsumes these political and economic premises towards its own ends. That is, religious ideals must either dispense of economic laws altogether and attempt to present them as a *secondary* motivation, or try to incorporate these economic conclusions through a form of syncretism by blending in its own ideological/onto-theological truths as having been always congruent with these realizations. Yuval Harari describes a similar phenomenon:

Osama Bin Laden for all his hatred of American culture, American religion and American politics, was very fond of American dollars. (Harari, 140)

The global trade network of today is based on our trust in such fictional entities as the dollar, the Federal Reserve Bank, and the totemic trademarks of corporations. When two strangers in a tribal society want to trade, they will often establish trust by appealing to a common god, mythical ancestor or totem animal. (Harari, 27)

As described by Saul Newman in *Political Theology* (2019), the public sphere seems to be composed of "nothing but a debating chamber that interminably postpones the decision, drowning it in endless deliberation and

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<sup>78</sup> See also Latour's *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods* (2011).

<sup>79</sup> See Ralston, *Voltaire's Bastards: the Dictatorship of Reason in the West* (2014).

<sup>80</sup> For an apt rendition of this argument, see Harari's *Homo Deus* (2016).

<sup>81</sup> I am borrowing from the subtitle of Michael Power's book, *The Audit Society: Rituals of Verification* (2013).

<sup>82</sup> "inasmuch as it enables production, need, supply, demand, value, and price, etcetera, to be linked together through exchange, the market constitutes a site of veridiction, I mean a site of verification-falsification for governmental practice" (Foucault 2008, 32).

equivocation" (Newman 2019, 30). Newman contrasts these slower democratic processes, with the perspective of thinkers like Carl Schmitt who characterize state-sovereignty as constituted by the very ability to suspend "juridical order" (Agamben 2005, 4), making decisions from *outside* its own apparatus:<sup>83</sup>

the authority to make decisions outside the law – in the liminal space of the exceptional situation that required the suspension of the normal constitutional order – was the ultimate and legitimate expression of sovereignty. If the sovereign cannot decide over and above what liberals affirm as the rule of law, the sovereignty is meaningless. (Newman 2019, 2, emphasis added)

This aporetic realm, referred to as the "War-Machine" in the work of Deleuze and Guattari,<sup>84</sup> and linked to the concept of 'liminality'<sup>8586</sup> within the work of Victor Turner's *Ritual Process* (1991),<sup>87</sup> opens a primary dichotomy where both democratic and dictatorial 'intentions' originate:

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<sup>83</sup> Agamben notes, "Scholarship is also correspondingly divided between writers who favor a constitutional or legislative provision for the state of exception and others (Carl Schmitt foremost among them) who unreservedly criticize the pretense of regulating by law what by definition cannot be put in norms" (Agamben 2005, 10).

<sup>84</sup> For a discussion of this "War-Machine," see Newman's *From Bakunin to Lacan* (2007).

<sup>85</sup> The concept of liminality, popularized by Turner's *Ritual Process* (1991), evokes how shared symbolic representations, which are practically enacted by individuals, simultaneously become collective substantiations without necessarily renouncing any contradictory interpretations. For example, when an individual's subjectivity is recognized through the celebration of completing a rite, a collective identity is also evoked by an audience witnessing the journey's end and paying homage to a survival and growth with, for example, a ritualistic applause; or perhaps, each couples' subjectivity may be enacted through the vows of commitment in a marriage ceremony, which again works in parallel to the collective identity evoked in the act of shared witnessing and commemoration of this event.

<sup>86</sup> See Clastres, *Archaeology of Violence* (2014, 144-150), on the related concept of 'Huaca.'

<sup>87</sup> In discussing the concept of *Anomy*, Agamben cites H.S. Versnel who refers to the work of Victor Turner on 'liminality' (citd. Agamben 2005, 66). With a discussion of Dante, Agamben returns to these inherent tensions: "Dante has summarized this amphibious character of poetic creation in a verse: *l'artista / ch'a l'abito de l'arte ha man che trema* ("the artist who has the habit of art has a hand that trembles," *Paradiso* 13.77-78; according to another reading, which seems to me *facilior*: *ch' ha l'abito de l'arte e man che trema* "who has the habit of art and a hand that trembles"). From the perspective we are interested in, the apparent contradiction between habit and hand is not a defect, but perfectly expresses the twofold structure of every authentic creative process, intimately suspended between two contradictory urges: thrust and resistance, inspiration and critique. And this contradiction pervades the entirety of the poetic act, given that habit already somehow contradicts inspiration, which comes from elsewhere and by definition cannot be mastered in a habit. In this sense, the resistance of the potential-not-to, by deactivating the habit, remains faithful to inspiration and almost prevents it from reifying itself in the work: the inspired artist is without work. Yet the potential-not-to cannot be mastered in its turn and transformed into an autonomous principle that would end up impeding any work. What is decisive is that the work always results from a dialectic between these two intimately connected principles" (Agamben 2019, XXX).

...the triumph of economy, that is to say, of the pure activity of governing which pursues only its own reproduction. The Right and the Left which today follow each other in managing power have thus very little to do with the political context from which the terms which designate them originate. Today these terms simply name the two poles (the one which targets without any scruples the desubjectivation and the one which wants to cover it up with the hypocritical mask of the good citizen of democracy) of the same machine of government. (Žižek 2012, 985)

Technological and ecological revolutions are moving forward without the critical questions that ask how we can develop the tools needed to be able to examine the value of the directions being taken. As if judging the moral efficacy of Caesar's decision to cross the rubicon, the crux of the problem is to find a means of distinguishing between the stresses that motivate actors from *within* this 'liminal' 'state of exception'.

We find discussions of turning points and revolutions throughout the millennia, influenced from the writings of Plato and Aristotle, especially in discussions regarding changing forms of governance. In discussing how regimes operate within a cyclical order called 'anakyklosis' (ἀνακύκλωσις) in Book VI of his *Histories*, Polybius had become influential for both Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*, and subsequently, the separation of powers integral to the *Federalist Papers* as well as the Constitution of the United States.

Plato's *Laws*, starts with an imposing question made by an Athenian stranger asking, "Is it a God or some human being, strangers, who is given the credit for laying down your laws? (Laws, 624a). From one interpretation, perhaps the answer to this question is found in Plato's *Republic*<sup>88</sup> with the allegory of the cave (Bloom, 518 c-e): succinctly put, we are told to imagine a society where people are raised in a cave since birth. The inhabitants never see the light of day. They spend their time staring at shadows which are manipulated by puppeteers in front of a fire, a stand-in for the light of the sun. Since the shadows are all they ever get to see, they mistake the figures that represent reality for reality itself. Though anyone could potentially turn their head and see that there is a light coming from outside the cave, it is not an easy task after having spent their lives in the darkness, staring at shadows. The act of

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<sup>88</sup> I primarily use Allan Bloom's translation of *The Republic of Plato* (1991) and Thomas Pangle's translation of *The Laws of Plato* (1988).

turning around is like a *pharmakon*, used to connote a type of medicine that simultaneously has the potential to act as a *scapegoat*, a poison and a cure.

This *reflexive turn* may be blinding for those of us who are seeing the divine light of universality for the first time. It may also be accompanied by grief, fear or an unexplainable trembling (Kierkegaard), or perhaps even a madness (Descartes), for everything that was once taken as knowledge (ἐπιστήμη/*epistēmê*) turns out to have been illusory. Though turning around is a remedy, the act may also induce pain for it is difficult to stare straight into a *transcendental* light. When exposed to the truth of this illusion, we cling onto whatever can provide “a psychological relief that has its basis in man's undirected instinctual structure” (Berger, 71).

Perhaps one of Plato's *pedagogical* intentions is to contribute to the ways of distinguishing between the *technê* (τέχνη- craft or art) of steering involved in disclosing the differing *epistēmê* (ἐπιστήμη - understanding). In Plato's *Republic*, Plato's Socrates can be read as being tasked with attempting to convince skeptical interlocutors like Thrasymachus, who combine epistemological limitations with problems involved in moral motivation to refer to this *aporia*, that the blinding light of the sun is instead the all-encompassing (divine?) light of 'Logos' (λόγος). From our contemporary point of view, this 'Logos' has at least two dimensions, one of “rationality” and the other, of “discourse.” As a 'reasoned discourse' or 'precise speech', 'Logos' may be the transcendental answer to the question put forth above in *The Laws*:

Logos as philosophic reason postulates a trans-historical, transnational, form of knowledge, whose "truth" or validity is independent of the context within which it may have arisen or within which it is inserted. (Fontana, 313)

From one interpretation of Plato's works in *The Laws* and *The Republic* there is an attempt being made to impart upon his students the 'technical' skills needed to be able to see through the blinding light of logos. If not mastered, one may be tempted instead by the *antithesis* to the ethical conclusions laid out by Plato's ideals, and come to conclude that a 'just life' is *not* motivated by any appeals to logic. Plato's infamous 'noble lie' is, like a useful fiction of universality to maintain social harmony, possibly a plea to avoid the societal demoralization that accompanies the otherwise prevailing belief that reasoned discourse is unhelpful for civic life and living unjustly can in fact be just as, if not more, pleasurable than living justly. Despite these attempts, Thrasymachus ultimately exemplifies a form of incommensurability by merely *leaving the conversation*. From Thucydides through to Thomas Hobbes and Niccolò

Machiavelli,<sup>89</sup> skepticism over how moral enlightenments can be motivated by the transcendental light of rationality persists. And in the most modern renditions, the exuberant and smiling handshake of Vladimir Putin and Mohammed Bin Salman,<sup>90</sup> in one fell swoop, dismissed a whole history of Platonic arguments upholding how living an unjust life is less pleasurable than living justly.

Nietzsche, another adamant 'interlocutor', looks at this blinding light and interprets that 'the truth is terrible.'<sup>91</sup> He distinctively expresses his dissatisfaction towards all the various modes of thought available to him, explaining how "many suns circle in desert space: to all that is dark do they speak with their light - but to me they are silent" (Z;XXXI, The Night Song). Nietzsche and Socrates share in their dissatisfaction of the various established, *institutionalized* answers attempting to respond to the questions of morality and how to live. Both examine the various viewpoints offered to them and see nothing but desert. Any substantive answers to the question of how one should proceed in life comes up empty. As a response to the desert, Socrates and the 'Western academic canon' chose to adhere to the 'gods' of dialectic and rationality. Nietzsche however, saw this strategy of being 'absurdly rational' as 'pathologically conditioned' (TI, 2:10); evidenced by Socrates' own death drive in his final decision to die. Instead, Nietzsche takes the madman, likely an adaptation of Diogenes of Sinope, seriously when he brings us an urgent message; the divine 'Logos' of modernity (God) "is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him" (GS, 125).

An aporia opens in the heat of this desert; a symbolism useful for those caught in the angst exerted by ecological devastation as well as the countless conflicting paradigms within the dizzying number of approaches to sense making and deriving value in a contemporary multi-sun, multicultural, multifaith and interconnected existence. Our ideas and identities are questioned at their root and there are no religious or rational springs to replenish the thirst for meaning. Just as in Christ's moment of doubt on the cross crying "Eli Eli Lama Sabachthani?"<sup>92</sup> or the pulsating heat of the beach felt by Meursault in Albert Camus' *L'Étranger* (1989), both the saintly *and* the apathetic are forced to reckon with these many suns and find themselves deep within the dread of a wasteland of meaningless suffering. This is a feeling

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<sup>89</sup> I acknowledge that these are overly simplistic representations that can be scrutinized.

<sup>90</sup> "Putin, Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman Greet Each Other with Huge Smiles, Handshake at G-20." Washington Post, 30 Nov. 2018.

<sup>91</sup> See Leiter, *The Truth Is Terrible* (2018).

<sup>92</sup> "God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46 & Mark 15:34).

described well by Bergson when he explains how there was always *something* looming in the background behind the obligations and habituations endowed to us by our parents, teachers, and societies; “we had an inkling of some enormous, or rather some shadowy, thing that exerted pressure on us through them” (Bergson, 9). However, perhaps just as the sun holds a pharmacological potential, this aporia arising out of these crevices of the desert is simultaneously a source which can both hollow out or fulfill the motivations needed to affirm life and participate in a civic sphere.

Perhaps to serve as a symbolic compass to help navigate through this desert, Nietzsche produces a narrativized ‘metamorphosis of spirit’ from the lion and camel to a newborn baby. Like a camel, one takes on the various burdens of the past, absorbing an endless amount of information. Though Nietzsche despises the camel for its tendency to *follow the herd*, in a situation so parched from meaning, only through a camel-like persistence can one develop the privilege to take for granted the coherence of an ultimately precarious life, at least for a while. However cow-like, the camel is a zen master in its own right as it produces a methodical ritual for the simple task of (onto-(theo)logical) survival.

Hiedegger’s works show how so much of life is “devoted to diverting our attention” from our onto-(theo)logical insecurities (Leiter, 1). Habitualized actions allow us to “take for granted” the meaning and coherence afforded through everyday existence (Berger, 71). When guests are invited to stare into the barrel of another person’s pupil for long periods of time, as Marina Abramovic’s artistic experiments show, most find themselves unable to maintain their sense of coherence for perhaps it is a stark reminder of our imminent vulnerability. It may be helpful to contrast this with a ‘practice theory’ approach to understanding media “which suggests that people use a range of media to try to maintain - not always with success - a sense of ontological security in a modern world in which biological death and the predictable cycles of clock-and-calendar time are among the only certainties” (Postill, 18). From a Confucian perspective however, the cyclicity of the clock-and-calendar of time itself is seen ritualistically. In a void of inescapable contingency, what is lasting becomes evermore valuable in and of itself. A credibility arises from the consistency of these measurement tools, which help us to master, or at least make-sensible, what will become ‘our’ domain (the ‘dominating’ imperative of Nietzsche’s lion). This unquestioned societal institutionalization is a stable, shared standard that keeps insecurities at bay on a collective level and helps to procure onto-(theo)logical security:



...In the loneliest wilderness happeneth the second metamorphosis: here the spirit becometh a lion; freedom will it capture, and lordship in its own wilderness. (Z, I, emphasis added)

Those with the courage to stare deeply into the blinding abyss of many suns, will realize that the desert itself has the potential to provide us with *clues* that can help navigate through the aporias. Nietzsche's lion is the spirit that provides this courage. Its proclamation, "I Will" is an affirmation to live, even in the face of such incomprehensible, meaningless suffering. Courage is needed to see the world but, for Nietzsche, rather than being transcendental, this act of creation is an aesthetic prowess:

The genius, too, does nothing other than first learn to place stones, then to build, always seeking material, always forming and reforming it. Every human activity is amazingly complicated. (Nietzsche 1996, 111)

Brian Leiter aptly defends the position that *The Truth Is Terrible* (2018). He explains that Nietzsche is profoundly innervated by the challenge posed by meaninglessness and eventually substantiates an aesthetic resolve, in opposition to a Platonic defense of discourse. Leiter explains how our fears of death, of being "destined for oblivion" (151), only scratches the surface of the dilemma of life. Behind all the "gentle gestures of bourgeois life," there is a reality akin to a *war of all against all*. If we are courageous enough to see this reality for what it is, we would not cling to illusions to comfort ourselves from the existential, epistemic, and psychological terrors of life. The most disturbing aspect of this tragedy is not merely that we will suffer, but that we will suffer meaninglessly: "the meaninglessness of suffering, not the suffering, was the curse which has so far blanketed mankind" (GM III:28). Nietzsche's response to this meaninglessness is a sharpening of an affective attraction to living through *aestheticism*.

From this point of view, Nietzsche's problem with the 'Socratic tradition' is not so much with an 'allegiance' to rationality, but it has more to do with a *degradation* of an aesthetic ideal; in contrast to the tradition of appraising Socrates' martyrdom, Nietzsche shows antipathy to Socrates as he did not *choose life* (TI, 2:12). Perhaps Nietzsche would have praised the sentencing of Socrates, not upon a theological or moral justification having to do with worshiping false gods and corrupting the youth, but on a justification of polluting the (dionysian/apollonian) *aesthetic*. However, the affective cure for the abyss of meaninglessness is only a privilege *for some*.

If the herd were to succumb to suicidal nihilism, while the Beethovens and Goethes, and their appreciative audience, were to survive and their material needs to be met, is there any reason to think Nietzsche would object? (Leiter, 168)

While aging liberal aphorisms dissolve, it has nevertheless become simply too much emotional labor to take on the well-being of our fellow camels. It is much easier to follow the example set by thousands of others, retreating to build aristocratic citadels/bunkers to defend from ecological disaster; or if one is not so economically privileged, they can enlist in the horde of *the anti-social* who choose liberation through isolation and “Hikikomori” lifestyles, or live a life of individualism by retreating into “man-caves.” However enticing these options may be, like a self-fulfilling prophecy, such solutions are actually fueling the problems we find ourselves in. Denying interconnectedness in modern society reminds me of René Girard’s analysis of how ‘Shakespeare satirizes a society of would-be individualists completely enslaved to one another’ (Girard 2000, 36).

Perhaps Nietzsche’s *third* metamorphoses of spirit may offer a guide. After having learned from the perseverance of the camel and the courage of the lion, a newborn baby, with its *untainted* eyes, develops the ability to see a world unconstrained by past institutions. Though Nietzsche is famously critical of Christianity throughout much of his work, he nonetheless *retains* an idea of a Christ-like rebirth, a *spiritual event* which compels the turning of the cheek, of which, Derrida praises for having “awakened us to responsibility for the very things we believe ourselves not responsible for” (Derrida’s Postcard, 264). The role of art may be to help see the world anew but much ink has also been spilled over the limitations to an appeal to aesthetics in terms of collective and civic responsibility. Corey Robin, in describing Nietzsche’s admiration for how slavery in Greek City states allowed for higher ideals, renews the allegations of Nietzsche’s Aristocratic sympathies when explaining: “existence can be redeemed only by art, but art too is premised on work” (Robin 2018, 137). It is here that we turn to ‘ritual’ to bridge the gap that an aesthetic appeal alone has failed to guarantee.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Agamben examines the notion “that between the sacred action of the liturgy and the praxis of the artistic avantgardes and of the art called contemporary there is something more than a simple analogy;” using several examples including the work of Marcel Duchamp’s invention of the “ready-made,” to encourage his readers to take seriously the hypothesis of thinking “the human as the living being without work,” analysing the potential of casting a “poetics of inoperativity” on to political action (Agamben 2019, XXX).

In *Plato's Pharmacy (Disseminations, 1983)*, Derrida discusses how Socrates in the *Phaedrus* is lured away, or *turns*, from his accustomed city life as, "operating through seduction, the pharmakon makes one stray from one's general, natural, habitual paths and laws" (Derrida, 70-71). After leaving the city, which symbolically refers to the 'society inside the cave', Socrates asks Phaedrus to *begin reading*. Pertinent for our discussion is that Socrates *evokes a ritual of storytelling to ease his discomfort outside the city*. Traditions of reading and writing are derivatives of ritual. Derrida locates the pharmakon in "the definition of writing, which is to repeat without knowing" (Derrida, 75). This act of repetition *without necessarily having knowledge* is intimately connected to the concept of ritual, and it is evoked in the discomfort that Socrates feels when he wanders out of his cave and into the wilderness, a "liminal" realm of inbetweens.

In a discussion of 'Hegelian subjectivity' as starting with a failure (or madness) by which subjectivity is evoked, Žižek refers to the ritual of reading as well:

this negativity, this unbearable discord, coincides with subjectivity itself, it is the only way to make present and 'palpable' the utmost - that is, self-referential - negativity which characterizes spiritual subjectivity. We succeed in transmitting the dimension of subjectivity by means of the failure itself, through the radical insufficiency, through the absolute maladjustment of the predicate in relation to the subject... to grasp the true meaning of such a proposition we must go back and read it over again, because this true meaning arises from the very failure of the first, 'immediate' reading. (Žižek 2008a, 235)

Thus, for Žižek, "Hegel's conception of habit is unexpectedly close to the logic of what Derrida called pharmakon, the ambiguous supplement which is simultaneously a force of death and a force of life" (Žižek 2012, 253). With its *pharmaceutical* logic, 'ritual' works to keep these onto(theo-)logical insecurities at bay and opens up possibilities for interdisciplinary analysis that has the potential to draw out the full breadth of *our* 'Gutenberg' galaxy. Marshall McLuhan also draws upon 'pharmaceutical' analogies when he focuses our attention to how participation in ritual "kept the cosmos on the right track, as well as providing a *booster shot* for the tribe." (McLuhan, 261, emphasis added).

However, as Kirill Chepurin's reading of Hegel exemplifies, the dichotomies between institutionalized traditions and creative innovation are always in *play*:

While the stars and racial background do exercise a certain influence on the human soul, it is the 'educated' person's task to resist these influences and leave them behind.  
(Chepurin, in Zantvoort et al. Location 2248)

Similar questions are also raised in *The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege* (2006), where Shannon Sullivan discusses how habitual patterns can be both personal and collective; as well as particularized yet still familiar across wider distances. Pointing to the importance of recognizing “global habits” she notes:

Society wide patterns of transaction exist, however, forming around certain experiences and histories that are socially and politically meaningful and sometimes becoming transcultural and/or international when similar experiences and histories are found across nations and even the entire globe. White privilege is one of these global habits, ubiquitous in the northern and western parts of the world and, in part because of hegemony of the north and west, present in the east and south as well.

Personal habits cannot be understood apart from the global, institutional, and other non personal habits with which they are transactionally formed. Yet one can make a functional (versus substantive) distinction between them, selectively attending to one or the other to gain a better understanding of it. (Sullivan, 187)

An erudite description of the pharmacological analogy of habit as described by Félix Ravaisson-Mollien can also be found in the work of Elizabeth Grosz:

While considered a virtue, habits also entail the possibility of a pathology. Habits exist somewhere between the necessity of ease and the torment of need, one side directed to making the world readily habitable, and making the living being at home in the familiar; the other directed to a trajectory of infinite repetition, a tic, an addiction, a limitation and constraint on life. (Grosz, 220)

With respect to this idea of institutionalized or global habits/rituals, Bruce Alexander's famous 'Rat Park' experiments conducted in the 1970's becomes a pertinent example. His work showed how rats who live in enclosed spaces are more likely to become addicted to substances than those who had

the option of living in a utopian 'Rat Park'. While becoming a source of substantial qualifications for the behavioral conclusions made from studying caged rats, startling realization also came from the connotations of how human urbanized societies resemble 'modern zoos'. Exploring these paradigms 40 years later in *The Globalization of Addiction: A Study in Poverty of the Spirit* (2010), Alexander comes to notions that run parallel to the overarching contentions of this work; describing how the social circumstances that spread the addictive tendencies exhibited by conquered and colonized peoples are also built into the very configuration of the "globalized" "geopolitical" and technologically expansive market system.

This is however, 'an extremely delicate passage', a *silk road* if you will, because such ritualized collective entrainments may continuously reinforce feedback behaviors and viewpoints that move towards any direction. We are made to walk a fine line between a 'ritual' which retains the 'perseverance' needed to survive the epistemological and affective perils of the wasteland, invaluable for those who find themselves upon terrains of extreme precariousness, while also being responsive to those aspects of ritual which allow for malleability, useful for those who are thrown into overly-regulated ways of living. What we will see is that any form of absolute (universal), whether it is through an individual subjectivity, a 'Weltanschauung' (world view), or a faith, tradition, or nationalism, cannot be assumed without having already conceded possibilities for its own fragmentation and disillusionment.

Just as Nietzsche's Zarathustra promulgates to his followers to learn "to live and to love the earth" (Z, 185) for they neither love themselves nor the earth, if there is a genuine expression of existing and cultivating a sense of belonging on this "thin" planet, the answer must be more than a reluctant acceptance. Perhaps if we stand instead at the right distance from our fearful rationality, neither renouncing nor letting insecurities take hold, we may be in a better position to respond to the question of life on this earth with an *emphatic yes*; or as in the sayings of Emanuel Levinas, an "unconditional" but "not naive" yes (Levinas, 49). While staring down into the abyss of our own demise and encountering uncountable and unfathomable incommensurabilities, perhaps by becoming conscious of our capabilities to inscribe ritual for ourselves and others there can be a better chance of deferring gratifications, surmounting cursory solutions, and enculturating a "virtue of courage"<sup>94</sup> instead of continuing to encourage merely biological survival within our enclosed camps.

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<sup>94</sup> Courage is described as "one of the most elemental political attitudes" (Arendt 2018, 35).

## Between Fragmented Subjectivities & Fragmented Absolutes

Through a “brutal and mercilessly depleting selectivity,”<sup>95</sup> we will survey the methodological problems that motivates our discussion by tracing a simultaneously onto(theo-)logical and epistemological dilemma<sup>97</sup> iterated in ‘Ritual Studies’ when attempting to define ritual. The predicament asks whether beliefs precede or follow ritual behaviors. Edward Shils, for example, assumes that ‘beliefs could exist without rituals but rituals cannot exist without beliefs’ (citd. Bell 2010, 19). A parallel debate exists amongst scholars of Confucianism with regards to the primacy of either a *system of ideas* in the form of *Ren* (仁), or the *practice* of ‘ritual propriety’ in the form of *Li* (礼). As Fingarette finds in *Confucius: The Secular As Sacred* (1972), and reiterated in Randall Collins’ *The Sociology of Philosophies* (2002), Chinese thought has historically been thoroughly unconcerned with psychological or metaphysical concerns. I contend that, especially when the Confucian way of life advocates finding *congruity to present circumstances*, in an era where far-off ideas are inevitably encountering one another, the centrality of such abstractions are unavoidable for contemporary Confucian scholars and ritual practitioners.<sup>98</sup>

One approach is to sharpen the anthropological question of whether beliefs are accessible from the point of view of observing researchers so as to also ask whether these beliefs are fully and consciously accessible by the practitioners themselves. Perhaps the actual motivation for the rituals taking place may not be fully apparent to those that are performing the act. As Žižek notes, a ‘Pascalian’ perspective would see ‘belief’ as propagated by an “external, nonsensical machine” (Žižek 2008, 34); that is, just by mindlessly repeating the same gestures, if you “act as if you already believe” then eventually “the belief will come” (ibid., 38).<sup>99</sup> While Fingarette’s Confucianism would just disagree with such mechanistic perspectives of ritual, Confucian thought generally lacks any fleshed out explanation as to *why*. Žižek goes onto apply this Pascalian proposition in a more precise manner by explaining how some sort of

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<sup>95</sup> This phrase is borrowed from Derrida’s “The Law of Genre” in *Acts of Literature*, (232)

<sup>96</sup> “Insofar as deconstructions can be undertaken, they are always asymmetrical by way of the doer’s (in this case the reader’s) “interest”” (Spivak 1999, 39).

<sup>97</sup> In a discussion of Deleuze, Grosz notes “Philosophy is about addressing the real, it is a form of ontology before it is capable of providing an epistemology” (Grosz, 229).

<sup>98</sup> “。。。儒学的复兴与中华民族的复兴密不可分。。。从历史上看，它一直是中华民族发展和壮大的根源，而我们却无法削减它。” “The revival of Confucianism is inseparable from the revival of the Chinese nation... historically it has been the root of the development and growth of the Chinese nation, and we have not been able to cut it” Tang Yijie, Scholar of Confucianism, on the *Revival of Confucianism* (Tang, 2018).

<sup>99</sup> “Plato’s suspicions of writing conforms to Pascal’s suspicions of imagination” (Mckenna, 29).

(ideological/theological/social) construct, must have *already* been functioning prior to the machine-like act:

When we subject ourselves to the machine of a religious ritual, we already believe without knowing it; our belief is already materialized in the external ritual; in other words, we already believe unconsciously, because it is from this external character of the symbolic machine that we can explain the status of the unconscious as radically external. (Žižek 2008, 42)

We can describe what precisely this mechanism is *external from*, by referring to Stuart Hall's genealogical interpretation of this (Western) "subject" in *Modernity and Its Futures* (1992). During the Enlightenment, the 'subject' was seen as rationally accessible to itself. Being a "fully centred, unified individual," this subject was assumed to be comprehensible to itself, as it is "endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness and action":

...[the] 'centre' consisted of an inner core which first emerged when the subject was born, and unfolded with it, while remaining essentially the same - continuous or 'identical' with itself - throughout the individual's existence. (Hall, 275)

More in depth sociological reflections would later see this 'enlightenment subject' as being inseparable from its particular context. Through this lens, the subject would comprehend itself by projecting cultural meanings and values onto its own identity; "subjective feelings" would *simply* align with the "objective social and cultural world" (Hall, 276) while both 'subjectivity' and "the cultural worlds they inhabit" become *stabilized* and made "reciprocally more unified and predictable" (ibid.). However, a plethora of paradoxes would soon present themselves when it was observed that a changing context would change this subjectivity in question.

Whether newly acquired 'rights of man' applied to slaves and women, as Olympe de Gouges' Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen (1791) or Toussaint Louverture's Haitian Revolution would exemplify (Braidotti, 159), remind us that the 'core' of this subjectivity has *always* been decentered and mediated. Emerging theories, through Freud's "discovery" of the unconscious, the Lacanian "Big Other" (Žižek 2012, 248), Edmund Burke's terministic screen, or a Hegelian double reflection, all converge when inspecting how the subject is not *readily* accessible to itself without some *mediating force*; a split, a vanishing mediator, a pre-existing condition, or 'ideology'.

In *Changing the Subject* (2017), Geuss describes the 'Hegelian spirit' by explaining that an individual's "psychology plays a remarkably subordinate role" as the term "refers neither exclusively to an individual, nor to a group" (Geuss 2007, 173-174). Again, the "external mechanism" is something akin to a *language community*. Language is given *unto us* from a community but there is also perhaps, a 'spiritual' process of mirroring where the 'I' distinguishes itself:

'I can't understand myself except as part of a 'we' which I can alternately identify with and distinguish myself from. So in a sense even self-understanding is a 'spiritual' phenomenon. (Geuss 2007, 176)

With a Hegelian admonition that "scepticism that is directed against the whole range of phenomenal consciousness... renders the Spirit for the first time competent to examine what truth is" (Hegel 2013, §78) combined with the famous Lacanian dictum that the "unconscious is structured like a language," Žižek is able to locate such complications of subjectivity early within Cartesian thought itself. In a comparison of Derrida and Foucault regarding Descartes, Žižek explains how "the cogito is related to its shadowy double, the pharmakon, which is madness" (Žižek 2012, 245). Since *the cogito* is a formulation which is 'something structured like a language', arising from within the madness of extreme doubt, *the self* is accessed more through an immediateness combined with pascalian repetition, rather than through any type of rationality or solely mechanistic proposition. From a Heideggerian viewpoint, the rational and self-reflective aspects of being seem to rest "on the existence of fundamentally non-reflective, non self-conscious, and (in some respects) non-rational dimensions in our existence" (Russon, 509). For phenomenology, the efficacy of a tool can only be assessed *after a breakdown of apprehension* (a failure to be *ready to hand*); similar to how, for Foucault, 'being civilized' can only be assessed when placed against madness; and for Marx, where an appreciation for capitalism is found only through the study of crisis. From within madness, the wholeness and unity of this being can be questioned:

In madness the individual becomes 'doubled', divided in two: the individual 'lets himself become captive to a particular, merely subjective representation, is thereby brought outside himself, moved outside the central point of his actuality and acquires (since he does at the same time preserve a consciousness of his actuality) two central points – one within the remains of his understanding consciousness, and the other within his mad representation'. (Chepurin in Zantvoort et al. Location 2385)



With respect given to the dilemmas of 'objectification', the concerns of those in postcolonial, 'decolonizing trauma'<sup>100</sup> and feminist studies, find a convergence with those attempting to be attentive to the voices of 'non-human' and 'terrestrial' beings. Methodologies, for example of providing accounts of lived experiences, arose from critical evaluations of approaches which attempted to have a subject eventually come to be something that can be sensed and recognized. And out of the Nietzschean aestheticist influences, rises a 'Postmodern' subjectivity: a melange of loosely tied together and contingent parts which are always in a state of flux, always only ever becoming. Thrown into a constant fragmentation, an 'assemblage' is *free to experiment with its subjectivity* through an interplay with whatever notions are available to it as an aggregation that could never be *essentialized*, or seen in relation to an *end goal* (telos). Expressions of freedom and agency are akin to a creative "play" by which subjectivity is *performed*<sup>101</sup> like an ever-becoming, makeshift *work of art*.

*Optimists* would see such 'de-rootedness' as being less constrained by normative restrictions and socio-historical conditioning. This assembled subject is thrown into (Geworfenheit) a continual flux of perpetual becoming; continually defamiliarizing itself with what at first seemed readily apparent. This may cultivate an increased tolerance towards more tentative, ephemeral, peripheral or discontinuous narratives and identities while showing potential for being more open to admit 'foreign' bodies into its fold as well; allowing an attentiveness to phenomena<sup>102</sup> that may perhaps at times be *inarticulable*, or even *unintelligible* to those who are supposed to be listening in; as is the case with critiques of the almost *voyeuristic narrativization* of legal proceedings exemplified by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Craps, 2015). A haunting Spivakian question, "Can the subaltern be heard?" echoes when scholars discuss the efficacy of such proceedings.

Though there exists a desire to "develop resources to begin to talk about culture as a multiplicity of trajectories" persists" (Shome 265, citd in Maggio, 420), many have come to the understanding that this "radically postmodern subject" is *still* a "colonial" construction (Maggio, 42) for it is "deeply bound to the politics of identity couched within the structures of gender, nation, class, race and diaspora" (Shome, 267). From the work of Hannah Arendt, Michelle Foucault, Giorgio Agamben and others, we can see how contemporary existence shapes a particular form of subjectivity that, however 'free', is

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<sup>100</sup> See Visser's *Decolonizing Trauma Theory: Retrospect and Prospects* (2015).

<sup>101</sup> For a vivid discussion of play, see Luce Irigaray's *The Sex Which Is Not One* (1985).

<sup>102</sup> Calling it a "historical event" or "trauma" is part of the contestation taking place.

ultimately rooted and limited by economic captivations, just as art is still “premised on work.”

Foucault shows that though the construction of ‘modern’ liberal ‘Western’ governmentality is founded on notions which venerate and value the enlightenment inspired, sociological, humanist subject, only a *shallow* form of this ideal seems to actually operate in practice. “Governmentality” transforms the idea of leadership to management and every institutional effort is made to *manage* the radicality (in contrast to its past) of the subjectivity being professed: “the ‘Enlightenment’, which discovered the liberties, also invented the disciplines.” (Foucault 2011, 222). From his lectures from 1978 to 1982, In *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008) through to *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (2005), Foucault traces how an ancient ideal of ‘know-thyself’<sup>103</sup> develops into a modern ‘care of thyself’ which finally formulates into a subjectivity *indistinguishable from a corporate entity*. That is, in the context of economic acculturation, the subject becomes a corporate enterprise *unto itself*, like an economic node in a network of productivity. Ultimately, living bodies become regulated by the edicts of marketability and productivity, otherwise known as ‘biopolitics’.

The work of Foucault, Agamben and Arendt sharpen Gilroy’s insight that “identity is increasingly shaped in the marketplace, modified by the cultural industries, and managed and orchestrated in localized institutions and settings like schools, neighborhoods, and workplaces” (Gilroy 1997, 106) by noting how the privatization of governments and schools and the commodification of homes, transforms the foundations of *all* aspects of life, such that even the time spent with family becomes a matter of economic exchange value.<sup>104</sup> the ‘*sacred spaces*’ of emotion and intimacy itself become entangled purely by calculative socio-economic concern.<sup>105</sup><sup>106</sup> This is an enculturation of “a new form to society

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<sup>103</sup> See also Wilkins, *Know Thyself" in Greek and Latin Literature* (2010).

<sup>104</sup> See also Furedi, *Therapy Culture Cultivating Vulnerability in an Uncertain Age* (2004).

<sup>105</sup> “What makes emotion carry this ‘energy’ is the fact that emotion always concerns the self and the relationship of the self to its environment. Emotion is less a psychological entity than it is a cultural and social one: through emotion we enact cultural definitions of personhood as they are expressed in concrete and immediate relationships with others. Emotion is thus about where one stands in a web of social relationships” (Illouz, 383).

<sup>106</sup> During a 1964 interview with Günter Gaus, Hannah Arendt notes: “Zu einer Gruppe zu gehören, ist erst einmal eine natürliche Gegebenheit. Sie gehören zu irgendeiner Gruppe durch Geburt, immer. Aber zu einer Gruppe zu gehören, wie Sie es im zweiten Sinne meinen, nämlich sich zu organisieren, das ist etwas ganz anderes. Diese Organisation erfolgt immer unter Weltbezug. Das heißt: Das, was diejenigen miteinander gemeinsam haben, die sich so organisieren, ist, was man gewöhnlich Interessen nennt. Der direkte personale Bezug, in dem man von Liebe sprechen kann, der existiert natürlich in der wirklichen Liebe in der größten Weise, und er existiert in einem gewissen Sinne auch in der Freundschaft. Da wird die Person direkt und unabhängig von dem Weltbezug angesprochen. So können Leute verschiedenster

according to the model of the enterprise... down to the fine grain of its texture" (Foucault 2008, 241):

...in everyday life, ideology is at work especially in the apparently innocent reference to pure utility - one should never forget that in the symbolic universe, 'utility' functions as a reflective notion; that is, it always involves the assertion of utility as meaning (for example, a man who lives in a large city and owns a Land Rover does not simply lead a no-nonsense, 'down-to-earth' life; rather, he owns such a car in order to signal that he leads his life under the sign of a no-nonsense, 'down-to-earth' attitude). (Žižek Plague, 2)

Through Marx and Hegel, we find an early and rigorous analysis of 'subjectivity' in relation to the material world.<sup>107</sup> In his lectures on Marxism, Geuss explains how Hegel worked to mark out the specific set of relations within various spheres of human life, whether that is the familial, the state, the religious, or what Hegel calls "civil society". Human existence cannot be reduced to any specific set of relations. That is, people don't treat their families as they would in terms of economic relationships, and perhaps, they aren't necessarily supposed to conflict their private interests with the interests of a more universal and civic sense of a political space. In a discussion about the work of Thomas Hobbes, Geuss writes:

We all grow up as members of 'families' of one form and structure or another. Outside some kind of family, no infant would survive. Part of what that means is that, even if the family is not a model of benevolence and altruism, in families we learn to rely on others for nourishment, protection, and minimal support and to depend on other family members to have reliable and appropriate motivations sufficient to satisfy at least our most basic needs. (Geuss 2007, 148)

Following Adam Smith's insights to how we even kings must bow down to economic laws, Marx sought to critique the vision of a state free from economic structures. The actual material relationships between the different spheres of communal life, the political, the familial, the religious and the

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Organisationen immer noch persönlich befreundet sein. Wenn man aber diese Dinge miteinander verwechselt, wenn man also die Liebe an den Verhandlungstisch bringt, um mich einmal ganz böse auszudrücken, so halte ich das für ein sehr großes Verhängnis" (Günter Gaus Im Gespräch Mit Hannah Arendt, 1964).

<sup>107</sup> Spivak notes that "Marx attempted to make the factory workers rethink themselves as agents of production, not as victims of capitalism" (Spivak 1999, 35).

material/economic, and the question of how permeable their distinctions are, is a concern expressed in Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*; the ambiguities between these realms become the primary contributor to developing the idea of 'alienation':

It would be very difficult to construct the political state and the constitution from the different elements of the people's life. It developed itself as universal reason over against the other spheres, as something beyond them. The historical task consisted then in their re-vindication, but the particular spheres did not realize here that their private essence coincides with the other-worldly essence of the constitution or the political state, and that its other-worldly being is nothing but the affirmation of their own alienation. The political constitution was formerly the religious sphere... .  
(Marx 2011, 35)

Through suppositions of universality, Marx parallels the "Hegelian state" as itself a *continuation of a latent religious tradition*; and the debate, as we will see, becomes whether the 'revolutionary' act is to overthrow this 'religiosity' completely, or accept it as fundamentally irrevocable.

He has a life both in the political community, where he is valued as communal being, and in civil society, where he is active as a private individual, treats other men as means, degrades himself to a means, and becomes the plaything of alien powers. The political state has just as spiritual an attitude to civil society as heaven has to earth. (Marx 2011, 53)

In the process of subsuming into their economic function, potential subjects become *estranged from themselves*. It is as if a cog in the machine realizes its own ever eroding surplus potential is being oriented towards objectives beyond its own knowledge, couched in terms of a road that leads *away from serfdom*.<sup>108</sup> Here, this potential subject could then freely decide regarding which *kind* of cog it wants to be, and where exactly it wants to fit in. This however, also requires that others are also treated like cogs, designated by the term *reification*. Then, with the question, "whether any civilization can wage relentless war on life without destroying itself, and without losing the right to be called civilized" (Carson, 59), comes a creeping realization that this machine which is fueled by assumptions of endless growth, is heading towards a cliff.

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<sup>108</sup> I am referring to Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* (2014).

In *The Human Condition* (2018), Arendt traces how the supposed 'fixed' perspectives of the "private" and "public" realms as understood from the Ancient Greeks have been eroding through time. Arendt explains how an Athenian conception would see the private sphere as being the site which attempts to fulfill biological needs (usually through slavery) as a means to achieving *loftier* goals. As the foundation for *activity* in the public sphere, the Athenians viewed the private sphere as what was supposed to provide the material foundations needed to make possible the free actions/speech in politics (for landholding male citizenry). The evolution of society is then an eventual "victory" for the "Animal Laborans" since there has been a complete incursion and erosion of both spheres. Through her own rigorous analysis, the resulting political landscape that she sees accords with the various analyses found in and out of the traditions of Marxism, where humanity becomes reduced to the 'homo economicus' (Arendt 2018, 320). However, instead of creating a system of castes that would allow for the "higher faculties" to reign, as perhaps the 'aristocratic' Nietzsche and the non-democratic reading of Plato's Republic would advocate, contemporary society developed an economy in which each person has become enslaved to every other person.

It is Agamben who radicalizes these theses by following the specific religious strands of the discussion and working to show how the *sanctity* and protections given unto life are understood on the basis of a particularly 'biological' existence. The 'sacredness' that is at once used to protect life then also becomes a way of *acculturating* 'bare life,' a politicized form of natural life where the prioritization of a *sacred life* through a biological lens conforms to notions of productivity in a way that actually limits the possibilities and potentialities of life. This question of sacredness returns us to our study of ritual through Malabou's analysis of Pascalian mechanization where the "social order is none other than the order of habituated bodies that thereby become the 'springs' of power" (Malabou 2019, 98). We also find in Grosz's discussion of Gilles Deleuze on Habit, how habituation (ritual) is a central predicament of governmentality, as an essential part of *civilizing processes*:

Habit has been regarded as something to be managed and regulated, privileging good habits (saving, wise investment, healthy lifestyles) and punishing bad ones (the criminalization of drug addiction, and the medicalization of many other types of addiction) in order to attain a desired outcome (ever growing needs, which are all capable of modification as the economy requires). (Grosz, 234)

Though it brings with it a whole set of freedoms, the subject of postmodernity ultimately becomes nauseatingly similar to the warnings found in the dystopian imaginations Huxley (1998) and Bradbury (1991). The postmodern subject affirms its own alienation with a smile<sup>109</sup> as it simultaneously acts as consumer, product reviewer, and producer in a mall inherently designed to *hypnotize*. This incites Malabou to ask “What should we do so that consciousness of the brain does not purely and simply coincide with the spirit of capitalism?” in her assessment of the possibility of a “neuronal form of political and social functioning” (Malabou 2008, 10-12). Again, the short *cultural* evolution of the internet reaffirms this narrative:

The individual in this cybernetic hell becomes simply a node in a network and, moreover, comes to see himself in this way. The neoliberal subject, homo economicus, the acquisitive, entrepreneurial, utility-maximising individual, is now accompanied by homo connectus, the constantly connected, constantly trackable individual. (Newman 2019, 151)

The hopes of finding freedom through subjectivities of pure assemblage, unconcerned and unburdened by any economic stimulus, perhaps superficially exemplified by the culture of ‘Myspace’ has instead turned into a vestigial subjectivity which perpetually and senselessly clicks, scrolls and consumes. While the only imaginable alternative seems to be the policing of content through the likes of great-firewalls and reactionary forms of political correctness, the internet now contributes to the creation of a subjectivity prone to perpetually becoming lost in continuous spectacle. Žižek notes how the privileges associated with this ‘assembled’ form of subjectivity are masking the actual anxieties of precariousness while being presented as freedom:

It is easy to praise the hybridity of the postmodern migrant subject, no longer attached to specific ethnic roots, floating freely between different cultural circles. Unfortunately, two totally different sociopolitical levels are condensed here: on the one hand the cosmopolitan upper- and upper-middle-class academic, always with the proper visas enabling him to cross borders without any problem in order to carry out his (financial, academic... ) business, and thus able to ‘enjoy the difference’: on the other hand the poor (im)migrant worker driven from his home by poverty or (ethnic, religious)

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<sup>109</sup> See both Sarah Ahmed’s *Happy Objects* (2011) and *Sociable Happiness* (2012)

violence, for whom the celebrated 'hybridity' designates a very tangible traumatic experience. (Žižek 2000, 220)

In the work and discussions between Rothberg (2009), Cathy Caruth (2016) and Stef Craps (2015), we find how these questions about the position of the subject in relation to its 'core' and the extent to which we can refer to a 'subject' as a unified entity becomes a primary impetus to a cultural study of trauma undergoing a 'post'-colonial turn; the possibility of developing a definition for "trauma" becomes both crucial and suspect when crossing cultural boundaries. Generally, definitions of trauma describe "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth, 11); yet, this kind of rationale had been formed through a specifically *Western lense*, primarily out of an engagement with the testimony, literature and history of the Holocaust, as well as the from the Veitnam war:

The experience of the soldier faced with sudden and massive death around him, for example, who suffers this sight in a numbed state, only to relive it later on in repeated nightmares, is a central and recurring image of trauma in our century. (Caruth, 11)

These attempts to *define* particular characteristics of trauma, inevitably leave some comprehensions excluded. Interpreting trauma in terms of a primary shock or pain cannot easily be applied to the disparate and ongoing intergenerational traumas of those subject to varying degrees of collective/continuous/cumulative forms of pain evoked through colonialisms, racial injustice, or even childhood neglect. As explained by Irene Visser, conventional interpretations of trauma as being 'inaccessible' or 'inexpressible' may overlook, for example, the complications associated with subjects engaging in postcolonial literature (Andermahr, 14): "trauma generates narrative possibility just as much as narrative impossibility" (Craps, 41). Stef craps' succinctly characterizes four inadequacies of trauma theory:

(1) they marginalize or ignore traumatic experiences of non-Western or minority cultures, (2) they tend to take for granted the universal validity of definitions of trauma and recovery that have developed out of the history of Western modernity, (3) they often favour or even prescribe a modernist aesthetic of fragmentation and aporia as uniquely suited to the task of bearing witness to trauma, and (4) they generally disregard the connections between metropolitan and

non-Western or minority traumas. As a result of all of this, rather than promoting cross-cultural solidarity, trauma theory risks assisting in the perpetuation of the very beliefs, practices, and structures that maintain existing injustices and inequalities. (Craps, 2)

Whereas an assembled subjectivity opens *some* to the “*play*” of *becoming*, as warned about in point #3, contemporary societies cultivate instead a form of subjectivity rooted in a ‘homo economicus’ not designed to produce ‘whole and unified’ subjects, but instead, parallel a “modernist aesthetic of fragmentation and aporia” (Craps, 2). Enculturing this type of ‘vestigial subjectivity’ has become the prerogative of the conquest of a *particular* “globalizing” rationale of financial and (geo)political game theories, as another iteration of biopolitics. Rodrigo Magalhães’s (2009) translation of P. L. Berger thoughts regarding this form of *aporic subjectivity* succinctly describes these dilemmas:

It is becoming increasingly more difficult to regard the ‘I’ as the center of a single individual’s actions. Instead, these actions are now regarded as events, which, without the doing of the individual, befalls him, and which may be explained by either exterior (social) or interior (organic or psychic) causes. The Cartesian “I,” that used to proclaim its “cogito ergo sum,” has been dissolved in a Machian stream of thingliness [Dinghaftigkeit]. The modern subjectivity erodes itself, so to speak. (Magalhães, 77-78)

In his work, *Adventures in Transcendental Materialism* (2014), Adrian Johnston identifies a peculiar Spinozism in the work of thinkers like Karen Barad, Elizabeth Grosz, Bruno Latour, Rosi Braidotti and Jane Bennet.<sup>110</sup> He critiques these thinkers as attempting to *stretch* “received concepts of agency, action, and freedom sometimes to the breaking point” (Bennet, x, emphasis added) by following a *clever* response to the Cartesian cogito; simply put, the “I think, therefore I am” (which is perhaps the primogeniture of the ‘enlightenment subject’), comes with the Spinozist realization that the ‘I’ is not necessarily needed for that construction since existence can precede thought without any “I”. Through what is called “Speculative Realism” or “New Materialism”, which are ‘open methodologies’ both keenly sensitive to the archival issues about what can be considered ‘inside and outside’, for at root they attempt to challenge

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<sup>110</sup> “to name just a few, Macherey, Jane Bennett, William Connolly, Manuel DeLanda, Elizabeth Grosz, and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri all are, to varying degrees and in different manners, representative of this revival of Spinozism in today’s multi-disciplinary theoretical landscape” (Johnston, 51).



the habit of only referring to issues as to how they relate to humans and being attentive to non-human forms of subjectivity. Utilizing social constructivist ideas as a way of overcoming the Spinozist (vitalistic and biological) determinism, these movements are critical of how the abstractions made in the sciences turn into *cultural realities*; especially when results-oriented investment structures rely upon objectification itself to clearly *mark* its 'progress'. Crudely put, the task of these methodologies is to reverse this trend by '*subjectifying*' *everything* to the point where the efficacy of holding onto the concept of subjectivity itself is questioned. Some dispense with the notion of subjectivity altogether, since it is an inevitably anthropocentric construct, while others attempt to be attentive to "trans/post-human" forms of subjectivity. Bennet attempts to highlight how objects have a "positive, productive power of their own" (Bennet, 1), while seeking:

(2) to dissipate the onto-theological binaries of life/matter, human/animal, will/determination, and organic/inorganic using arguments and other rhetorical means to induce in human bodies an aesthetic-affective openness to material vitality; and (3) to sketch a style of political analysis that can better account for the contributions of nonhuman actants. (Bennet, x)

In an attempt to demarcate the distinction between Hegelian "panlogism" from what he perceives as being an *anachronistic misinterpretation* that sees Hegel in terms of "panpsychism" or "vitalism," Johnston critiques what he sees as a pervading underlying 'Neospinozism' espoused by these authors. He refers to Lacan regarding a "long-standing philosophical problem" that initially arose during the discussions between German idealists<sup>111</sup> to mark how these issues are "not so much solved as allowed to fall by the wayside over the course of historical time" (Johnston, 85). Johnston works to find what he sees are the core Hegelian realizations within Spinozist philosophy itself:

Spinoza's greatest breakthrough arguably is his realization of the mutual exclusivity between infinitude and transcendence (i.e., what is transcendent cannot be infinite and vice versa). If something stands separately over and above other things, then this something is limited, namely, rendered finite by whatever subsists beyond/outside its own transcendent sphere; inversely but correlatively, if something is genuinely (instead of spuriously) infinite, it neither is external to anything else nor is anything else

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<sup>111</sup> See note 11.

external to it. Hence, the true (rather than specious) infinite directly and necessarily entails strict immanence insofar as it fundamentally excludes any and every transcendence. According to Hegel's immanent critique of Spinoza's rationalist substance metaphysics (with the latter's radical monism inextricably intertwined with these musings on the infinite), what Spinoza rightly prohibits for the infinity of God/Nature as the One-All of ultimate Being he implicitly and wrongly, judged even by his own ideas and standards, permits for the reflective position of intellectual intuition as external reflection. (Johnston, 33)

For Johnston, these neospinozists do not fully appreciate how "contemplation stands on a transcendent metalevel above whatever is material/real, thus implicitly making contemplation something immaterial/ideal" (Johnston, 78). He explains that regardless of any ontological speculations, we cannot mistake the human capacity to leap for flying itself.<sup>112</sup> Johnston's grievance is that "one must distinguish between anti-humanism and anti-subjectivism" (Johnston, 50) for which he finds the main culprit to be an "arguably anachronistic" interpretation of Hegel's corpus in "Jean Hyppolite's *Logic and Existence*," which is foundational to both Deleuze and the following Neo-Spinozist tradition. He instead affirms a reading of Hegel that is found precisely on the grounds of finitude, a transcendental subjectivity, which ultimately goes against the postcolonial hesitancy that "all transcendental cultural logic is, at its heart, imperialistic" which certain readings of Hegel evoke (Maggio, 420).

The primary contribution is that 'finitude' is necessarily connected to the perspective of particularity in a way that is unlike Spinoza's monadic spiritualism because a "spiritual event" only happens with a splitting self-negation; finding that 'the absolute' is fragmented simultaneously affirms both finitude and particularity. This is the philosophy behind 'the greatest story ever told' explored in the next section.

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<sup>112</sup> This metaphor was actually used by Kierkegaard as a critique of a specific interpretation of the Hegelian dialectic, which is similar to the reading that Johnson is scrutinizing. See Hannay (xxii) for this discussion.

## Ritual Shadows of Sacrament

According to Rene Girard's Mimetic theory, just as the research into mirror neurons suggests, our desires are influenced by other peoples' desires. When drawn towards the same objects of desire, tensions increase and rivalries emerge; a "cumulative resentment and vengeance" then becomes likely to produce "a state of Hobbesian radical crisis of all against all:"

The most (or rather the only) effective form of reconciliation – that would stop this crisis, and save the community from total self-destruction – is the convergence of all collective anger and rage towards a random victim, a scapegoat, designated by mimetism itself, and unanimously adopted as such. In the frenzy of the mimetic violence of the mob, a focal point suddenly appears, in the shape of the 'culprit' who is thought to be the cause of the disorder and the one who brought the crisis into the community. He is singled out and unanimously killed by the community. He isn't any guiltier than any other, but the whole community strongly believes he is. The killing of the scapegoat ends the crisis, since the transference against it is unanimous. That is the importance of the scapegoat mechanism: it channels the collective violence against one arbitrarily chosen member of the community, and this victim becomes the common enemy of the entire community, which is reconciled as a result (Girard 2017, 45)

Girard brilliantly traces the ritual of Christian sacrifice from an evolution out of the God of the Old Testament. This God, which intervenes in the last moment to save Isaac before Abraham is able to fulfill his ritual sacrifice, is one step towards the creation of increasingly peaceful rituals, especially in comparison to the more violent human and infant sacrifices of the past. Transferring the violence of ritual onto a lamb is hypothesised to be the first iteration of renouncing violence.

Christianity, in turn, is characterized by Christ's imperative to "turn the cheek" as being the epitomic break from an age-old mimetic 'feedback loop' of accumulated rivalries resulting in sacrificial denouements. From Girard's view, Derrida is really commending a Christian imperative of rebirth retained in Nietzsche's third metamorphosis when crediting him for 'having awakened us to the responsibilities that are not our own'. Ultimately, "the Bible provides not merely a replacement of the object to be sacrificed, but the end of the sacrificial order in its entirety, thanks to the consenting victim who is Jesus

Christ" (Girard 2017, 146). Whereas Abrahamic sacrifice attempted to distance ritual from human sacrifice, Christian Sacrifice is an attempt to break from the prior rituals of sacrifice altogether.

Žižek, however, sharpens this thesis by referencing the work of Dupuy:

This eventuality reaches its apogee in Christ, who is "the figure of a pure event, the exact opposite of the habitual" (Žižek 2012, 253)

The story is not told by the collective staging the sacrifice, but by the victim, from the standpoint of the victim whose full innocence is thereby asserted. (Žižek 2012, 698)

The radical break introduced by Christianity consists in the fact that it is the first religion without the sacred, a religion whose unique achievement is precisely to demystify the Sacred. (Žižek 2012, 702-703)

In Žižek's "Meditation on Michelangelo's Christ on the Cross" (2008b) there is a discussion of G. K. Chesterton regarding various moments where *God is split*. "In other religions you pray to God, but only in Christianity does God pray to himself" (Žižek 2008, 128).<sup>113</sup> Iterated through the book of Job where, on the question of suffering, God "insists on the inexplicableness of everything" (Žižek 2008, 129); that is, instead of omniscience, God himself seems "overwhelmed at the excess of his creation" (Žižek 2008, 129-130). For Žižek, God's own incredulity towards himself comes to fruition in Christ's moment of *madness, finitude and doubt* on the cross, when crying "Elahi Elahi, Lama Sabachthani!"

This rupture from the past comes not only from how 'an absolute' (God) is doubting himself while going forth to die a particularly *atheistic* death.<sup>114</sup> This rupture also comes from an *individual perspective*, where the "innocence of the victim is revealed" (Dupuy, 41) and takes precedence over the collective perspective regarding the efficacy of ritual. The perspective of innocence is illustrated by Salvador Dali's *Christ of Saint John of the Cross*, where the empathetic point of view is seen from Christ on downward. The audience sympathises not with the past justifications given for ritual, which was perhaps needed to uphold collective unity,<sup>115</sup> but instead, with the treatment and finitude of an individual (pre-humanist). I interpret the Islamic *Shahada*,

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<sup>113</sup> Žižek evokes this paradigm as a joke when he applauds himself after a lecture.

<sup>114</sup> What happens to Christ in the three days *of death* on the cross is a subject of dispute.

<sup>115</sup> See note 52.

“لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ” (“there is no God but God”) as an implicit acknowledgment and refutation of this Christian-Humanist-Atheism: While the *Shahada* holds that one becomes a genuine believer of God only after one has survived the doubts of atheism, Žižek contends that one can only become an Atheist *through the spirit of desacralization found in Christian Revelation*:

It is certain that a man must completely despair of himself to become fit to obtain the grace of Christ. (Luther, 502)

Žižek attempts to fulfill his “secret dream” to become “Hegel’s Luther” (citd. Johnston, 112) through a Lacanian ‘de-universalization’ of the Hegelian universalist subject.<sup>116</sup> It is this spirit throughout the *Third Manuscript* where Marx ties together the concepts of ‘alienation’ with the superseding evolutions of religiosity, which is also the spirit or “geist” that Hegel evokes. Such an evolution can be traced from the inception of Paulinian-Christianity, through to the Council of Nicea, and reanimated by Protestant reformations. This is the Marxist-Hegelian dialectic, defining the ‘stages’ upon which *spirit progresses towards ‘freedom’*:

Just as Luther recognised religion – faith – as the substance of the external world and in consequence stood opposed to Catholic paganism – just as he superseded external religiosity by making religiosity the inner substance of man – just as he negated the priests outside the layman because he transplanted the priest into laymen’s hearts, just so with wealth: wealth as something outside man and independent of him, and therefore as something to be maintained and asserted only in an external fashion, is done away with; that is, this external, mindless objectivity of wealth is done away with, with private property being incorporated in man himself and with man himself being recognised as its essence. But as a result man is brought within the orbit of private property, just as with Luther he is brought within the orbit of religion. Under the semblance of recognising man, the political economy whose principle is labour rather carries to its logical conclusion the denial of man, since man himself no longer stands in an external relation of tension to the external substance of private property, but has himself become this tense essence of private property. What was previously being external to oneself – man’s actual externalisation – has merely become the act of externalising – the process of

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<sup>116</sup> Contrastingly, Engels calls “Adam Smith the Luther of Political Economy” (Marx 1844).

alienating. This political economy begins by seeming to acknowledge man (his independence, spontaneity, etc.); then, locating private property in man's own being, it can no longer be conditioned by the local, national or other characteristics of private property as of something existing outside itself.

(Marx's *Third Manuscript*)

Christianity, or at least what modernity was to make of it, became the driving force behind the progressive elimination of all taboos, all prohibitions, all limits. In the meantime science itself has taken over from the religions of the Bible in bringing about this desecralization, by stripping nature of its prescriptive or normative value. (Dupuy, 72)

It is this spirit of self-negation that evokes a continual 'atheistic' negation, the self-criticism involved in the splitting of absolutes. From the theological, as per God's restraint of killing Isaac, God's bewilderment of his own creation in the book of Job, and the self-doubt, (Cartesian-like) madness, and disenchantment experienced on the Cross, that motivates practical evaluations that provoke debate, religious reformation, political revolution,<sup>117</sup> and even scientific progress. However, this is perhaps also the spirit of contemporary despiritualization and alienation:

The last grandly-conceived theorem of bourgeois self-criticism has become a means of making bourgeois self-alienation, in its final phase, absolute, and of rendering ineffectual the lingering awareness of the ancient wound, in which lies hope of a better future. (Adorno 2005, 66)

From a Kierkegaard's exploration of 'the absurd', this thesis brings us back to the idea of changing the center from *that which is most peripheral yet still from within*. In the assertion that an omnipotent and omniscient being manifested itself as a finite human, the primary locus of Kierkegaard's faith is expressed as the utmost absurd form of paradox. As the "the exact opposite of the habitual," Christ's crucifixion is astounding, for a 'divine figure' is mortally punished, which is a completely alien and absurd notion that shattered world-views in comparison to past imaginations regarding what a savior *should* look like. Edward Said reiterates this language of fragmentation when explaining how "Christianity shatters the classical balance between high and

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<sup>117</sup> The original meaning of revolution, was to 'revolve' back into what was already the case.

low styles, just as Christ's life destroys the separation between the sublime and the everyday" (Said, 106).

Here is inception of *Messianic time*, illustrated by "Christ's skeptical words against the prophets of doom" (Žižek 2012, 703):

If we reject the Kingdom—that is, if violence is not universally and categorically renounced—all that is left to us is a game of immense hazard and jeopardy that amounts to constantly playing with fire: we cannot risk coming too close, lest we perish in a nuclear holocaust (this is the principle of existential deterrence); nor can we risk standing too far away, lest we forget the danger of nuclear weapons (this is the Jonah paradox). We must neither believe too much in fate nor refuse too much to believe in it. We must, that is, believe in fate exactly as one believes in a work of fiction. In principle, the dialectic of fate and chance permits us to keep just the right distance from the black hole of catastrophe: since apocalypse is our fate, we are bound to remain tied to it; but since an accident has to take place in order for our destiny to be fulfilled, we are kept apart from it (ibid).

In Mark 13:1-23, Christ warns that during the end of days there will be false prophets pointing to signs of apocalypse and doom in all directions; though they will only lead people astray. This existential deterrence is for Walter Benjamin, a *Messianic cessation of happening*:

A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure he recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past.  
(Benjamin, 263)

Through Žižek's Lacanian-Hegelian lense, the contemporary resurfacing of monadic spirituality exemplified by (Jungian-inspired) new-age mysticisms, Californian Buddhisms, Neospinizisms, Naturalisms, pantheisms vitalsims, and "resuscitated" Paganisms, are all 'ideological' paradigms<sup>118</sup> that *deprioritize this messianic cessation*. For Žižek, these 'symptoms' result from the incomplete realization that "the only radical alternative" to the "madness" of the 'conditions

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<sup>118</sup> In addition to, but different from, the usual critiques of capitalist commodity/brand fetishism, we can include celebrity worship, nationalism, leader idolatry, racial superiority, as well as the adoration of Monarchy.

of postmodernity' lead to a dangerous reversion to an "even worse madness of religious fundamentalism, a violent retreat into some artificially resuscitated tradition" (Žižek 2019, 2):

The problem for those in power is how to get people do the dirty work without turning them into monsters. This was Heinrich Himmler's dilemma. When confronted with the task of killing the Jews of Europe, the SS chief adopted the attitude of "somebody has to do the dirty job". In Hannah Arendt's book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, the philosopher describes how Nazi executioners endured the horrible acts they performed. Most were well aware that they were doing things that brought humiliation, suffering and death to their victims. The way out of this predicament was that, instead of saying "What horrible things I did to people!" they would say "What horrible things I had to watch in the pursuance of my duties, how heavily the task weighed upon my shoulders!" In this way, they were able to turn around the logic of resisting temptation: the temptation to be resisted was pity and sympathy in the presence of human suffering, the temptation not to murder, torture and humiliate.

There was a further "ethical problem" for Himmler: how to make sure that the executioners, while performing these terrible acts, remained human and dignified. His answer was Krishna's message to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad-Gita* (Himmler always had in his pocket a leather-bound edition): act with inner distance; do not get fully involved. (Žižek, 2006)

The scene that Žižek is referring to is in the *Bhagavad-Gita* when Krishna appears during Arjuna's hesitation before a great battle and he is faced with the decision to order his armies to kill an opposing side, who are family members. This assessment is actually a refined iteration of Hegel's critique about Hinduism's reliance on "abstract universality and unity" (Hegel 1988, 366), as a contribution to his argument of the *historical stages* that lead towards the west and the culmination of a German national spirit (*Volksgeist*).

However, in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999) Spivak refutes these interpretations of Hinduism on the grounds that they are *historically contingent extrapolations* made to fit Hegel's preformulated 'Euro-teleological normativity' (Spivak 1999, 58). She explains that the limited translations of Indian thought available for Western audiences exaggerated the importance of the



Bhagavad-Gita in comparison to a complex history that included other texts that were in dialogue with one another, like the *Mahabharata* & *Rāmāyaṇa*. Indeed, Collins' (2002) vivid explanation of how colonialism shaped the evolution of Hindu thought concurs with Spivak's perspective. Though similar forms of 'syncretism' also took place in Hindu thought with the emergence of Islam in India during the 1500s, the substantial power imbalances between the European colonizers and the incredibly diverse range of thought in India, *forced the consolidation of a degraded set of ideals for the sake of the solidification and the protection of culture*.

Before this time, Hindu, Jain, Zoroastrian, Buddhist and Islamic thought in India were mired in endless diffusions, debate and conversation and Guru-rivalry and were not subject to massive power imbalances. Even "sophisticated" discussions, mirroring for example the conversations between Humian and Kantian thought, can be found disguised within religious rhetoric. With the arrival of the British Frigates however, came a renewed motivation to strengthen a caste system, even though this system had already been crumbling under the prior weight of vibrant and complex dialogue:

These modern philosophers syncretized positions whose political underpinnings had been weakened. They pulled together a Hindu national philosophy in united front against European colonial domination after 1800, and contrasted it as sharply as possible with modern European secularism and materialism. Just at this time the concept of a unitary "Hindu" culture was formulated, first by British administrators, then embraced by Indian nationalists themselves. (Collins 2002, 270)

This narrative affirms Collins' thesis that widely accepted ideals, philosophies and religions tend to fragment into factions, while more 'insecure' ideals tend to reinforce themselves through syncretic unification. A similar story of how ideological structures tend to consolidate in response to modern Westphalian state-structures, can be told with regards to colonial struggles generally; both the Islamic Republic of Iran or the Secular Monarchical Regime that preceded it, had tried to erase vast difference of multiculturalism under one centralizing ideology of either religion or monarchic-nationalism; China's ongoing cultural revolution, in response to growing demands of global geopolitics, also bolster Han-supremacy, and the erasure of less stable multicultural complexities. The reverse of this thesis also applies in response to today's overabundance of instagram-Gurus, where we are witness to an excessive fragmentation of ideals within an underlying neoliberal homogeneity.

While favoring their strongest ideals as the cement to aid in socially, economically and politically effective forms of unification, “modernization” required one-dimensional acculturations and state-endorsed educational languages, which generated cultural traumas associated with the irrevocable loss of identities - the European Experience of this can be found in the unification of Germany or the consolidation of French through a Collège de France. From the pressures of ‘modern’ ‘geo’-politics, modernity forces ‘cultures’ to homogenize diversity in favor of unique forms of conservatism while those who failed in this endeavor, like the Austrian-Habsburg regime, disintegrated (and continue to haunt us today). Just as we are mired by our rhetorical illusions about computers as being interfaces of ‘multimedia’ when they only incorporate the senses related to audio-visual feedback, perhaps we are currently experiencing another polymorphous leap into a homogeneous techno-future.<sup>119</sup>

With homogenization comes translational biases and omissions, which can be traced to even the work of esteemed writers like Max Weber and Hegel:

Jacob Rösel in his monograph *Die Hinduismusthese Max Webers* argues that the vision of a society organized around caste was an intellectual construct of Brahman thinkers from which the British derived the categories used in their censuses. The censuses for their part generated a picture of India in conformity with this Brahman vision, and the British through their legislation and judicial decisions in turn did all they could to make Indian society conform to this vision, thereby rendering the caste order into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Thus not only, according to Rösel, is Weber’s analysis tainted by his almost exclusive reliance on sources produced by biased and self-interested groups, but it is built around a social category— caste— the nature and even existence of which prior to British rule cannot be established with the kind of sources Weber draws upon. (Ertman, 24)

Spivak concurs with these problematic Hegelian (and consequently, Žižekian) representations by showing how the version of Hinduism that was put under the microscope, is the same “monstrosity without aim and measure” (this is how Hegel describes Hindu deities) (Hegel 1988, 338, citd. Spivak 1999, 55) that is defended by modern Hindu Nationalists:

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<sup>119</sup> See Tolentino, *The Age of Instagram Face: How social media, FaceTune, and plastic surgery created a single, cyborgian look* (2019).

...that an ethnicity untroubled by the vicissitudes of history and neatly accessible as an object of investigation is a confection to which the disciplinary pieties of the anthropologist, the intellectual curiosity of the early colonials and the European scholars partly inspired by them, as well as the indigenous elite nationalists, by way of the culture of imperialism, contributed their labors, and the (proper) object (of investigation) is therefore "lost". (Spivak 1999, 60)

The problem is that Colonizers would attempt to find "native informants" who *speak on behalf of whole continents*<sup>120</sup> especially when their views align with their own interests. Colonizers would get tribal chiefs to sign a piece of paper to 'legitimize' the suzerainty over, and exploitation of, the land specified in the treaty in the eyes of other Europeans - a predicament that Zuboff (2019) would allegorize to explain modern profit-driven predatory information extraction where we sign away our rights to use certain software platforms without any meaningful understanding or consent about privacy policies.

Indeed, academic faculties like Anthropology, were once providing the theoretical bases for political penetration by unwittingly imposing Western forms of Westphalian governmentality. Attempts made by 'objective outsiders' who, by placing a culture under a microscope for the purposes of academic study, have helped, "to oppress" (Lewis, 1973). For Marshall Sahlins:

...economic integration of the whole, the transmission of both grid and code, social differentiation and objective contrast, is assured by the market mechanism - for everyone must buy and sell to live, but they can do so only to the extent that they are powered by their relations to production... capitalist production is as much as any other economic system a cultural specification. (Sahlins, 213)

...the history of anthropology is a sustained sequitur to the contradiction of its existence as a Western science of other cultures. The contradiction is an original condition: a science of man sponsored by a society which, in a way no different from others, exclusively defined itself as humanity and its own order as culture. (Sahlins, 54)

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<sup>120</sup> *Without comment*, Spivak asks readers to reflect upon Gandhi's stance on the ritual of *Sati*.

Even still, this process perhaps allowed society to “learn something from others-about itself” (ibid.). As Susan Sontag discusses, in their commitment to “an intensely personal kind of discipline, like psychoanalysis,” anthropologists like Levi-Strauss had perhaps been attempting to ‘save their own souls’ “by a curious and ambitious act of intellectual catharsis” (Sontag, 75) rather than engaging in an endless pursuit of objective scientific analyses.

Spivak also adds to the refutation of this Hegelian representation *exegetically*, though summarizing her in depth analysis is beyond the scope of this work, what is important for us is her argument that:

taken as static and monotonous by Hegel, such summaries are allowed by way of a textual ruse of the self-excusing unendorsable erring request endorsed as an indulgence of a human error that must nonetheless deny the phenomenality of affect and deny the ground of verification by the so-called concrete lived present. The proper name of the caste stands as a mark to cover over the transition from a tribal society of lineage, where one cannot kill one's own kin, to something more like a state where one's loyalties are to abstracter categories for self-reference. (Spivak 1999, 58)

Hegel's interpretation of Hindu thought may very well be that which had influenced Himmler to supposedly carry a copy of the Bhagavad-Gita book in his pocket; as a way of providing the spiritual confidence necessary for his executioners to retain their sanity while simultaneously committing to and maintaining psychological distance from their atrocities. Ironically, this distinctly privileged interpretation is upheld by both Hindutva Nationalists<sup>121</sup> (criticized by Hegel and Žižek) as being the authoritative source of Hindu thought. An interpretation endorsing the “simplicity of life and elevation of purpose” (Thoreau, 99)<sup>122</sup> cannot be disambiguated from a prolonged history of dialectic that is neglected by both an imperceptibility for audiences facing translational issues, while also not having access to the larger conversation taking place. Not to mention the already pre-established political/philosophic goals which an uncontested reading would confirm. Collins' work recognizes plenty of examples where ideals are molded to fit specific socio-economic or political circumstances. Any in-depth interpretations that affirm the fragmentations of absolutism, as well as any fluid forms of socio-political understandings where, for example, we can find a “liberating and flexible

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<sup>121</sup> An eerily similar story could be told for how western interpretations of cultures form into overly zealous forms of nationalism for Iranian's supporting the prior regime of the Shah.

<sup>122</sup> Thoreau's words are used to parallel an excessive idealism from a privileged position.

vocational definition of caste offered by Krishna" (Spivak 1999, 57, footnote 69), are then buried under the weight of colonial history. Such nuance and arduous in-depth analyses are then condensed and ignored by a publishing bias towards that which is most easily marketable, which again, reiterates the very problem of excessive emotional labor required by civic engagement in democratic societies.

Spivak's warnings later return to clarify notions about the relationship between deconstruction and subjectivity. For her, a deconstructed subjectivity is not the same as the subjectivity composed of fluid assemblages, as argued for example by New Materialist understandings, or proponents of Object Oriented Ontology like Latour and Morton, because there is never a claim that the subject was never really there. Whereas these 'neo-Spinozists' argue that the subject had arisen out of the bias of the anthropos, and Johnston's affirms the inescapability of subjectivity through a Hegelian transcendental dialectic, from the view of deconstruction, Spivak explains that the centering of subjectivity is unavoidable as the subject orients itself through "play" (which for scholars of ritual, is what exists in the realm of liminality) :

Indeed, it can be shown by textual analysis that all the so-called poststructuralists, at their most theoretical, situate subjecting rather than kill the subject or pronounce it dead. Humanism names man (at best the human being) as the master of an unexamined subjective agency. To question this conviction is not to "kill the subject. (Spivak 1999, Footnote 15, 322)

...the argument about the subject entailed by deconstruction could be this: The subject is always centered. Deconstruction persistently notices-unavoidably centering itself in order to notice that this centering is an "effect-structure" entailing indeterminate boundaries that can only be deciphered as determining. No politics can occupy itself with only this question. (Spivak 1999, 323).

*Différance* is a Derridian term that acquaints an audience to an always present possibility of the deferral and differentiation of the intended meaning of text (what he refers to as an 'accumulated reserve' is the textual tradition *within*) where any form of media can be analyzed as a text. For Derrida, there is no originality; no *genealogy* by which notions of subjectivity were gradually assembled or made to be more susceptible to deconstruction. In every new context and situation, subjectivity is *subjectively apprehended* and just as Braidotti's example of Olympe de Gouges' shows, the possibility that the

meaning of subjectivity would be both deferred and differing from expectations had existed from their very inception. Any supposedly originary inception of subjectivity emerges conjointly with its own contestation. In the traditions of radical atheism (Žižek) or negative theology (Adorno), this split/contestation within the very inception of a concept, as in the realm of the divine, like in Christ's nihilism on the cross, there is a move to continually dismantle or negate absolutes, which is perhaps an effective source of moral motivation; negation is the immediate fuel for taking responsibility.

However, these dichotomies open up fissures that, only reveal further dichotomies, as can be realized with Edward Baring's in *The Trace of God* (2015) who expresses skepticism about these negative theologies that always seek to dismantle monads. During a discussion of Henri Birault's Christian interpretation of the Heideggerian tradition, from the section entitled *Theism and Atheism at Play*, Baring notes:

...because the rejection of God and Being was so absolute, as in the classic deconstructive schema, it came to reintroduce precisely what it hoped to reject. (Baring, 84)

With his own translation of the work of Birault, Baring traces how a "strange duality" of finitude and infinitude "reverberates throughout the Western metaphysical tradition:"

In Plato's *Sophist*, Theatetus is led by a stranger in a meditation on the Parmenidian idea of non-Being. The Stranger suggests that the very possibility of speaking of non-Being — of making claims about it: "non-Being is..." — implies that, in Birault's words, "in a certain manner, it is." But since this non-Being cannot be applied to any actual material being, its Being can only be located in the realm of ideas. As the stranger elaborated, and in direct opposition to the first meaning of non-Being in Greek thought, non-Being was the very condition of definition. In this case then, as Birault summed up, negativity acts as the "essential foundation [fondement] of discourse..."

It appears that Being itself must mix itself with non-Being for philosophy to be possible... non-Being seemed to play both sides in the game of the finite. (Birault, citd. Baring, 74-75)

For the Greeks, infinity lacked/negated finitude, as the Platonic form was something that was unattainable to every particular conception and the creation story is one of an “ordering (of) formless matter” (ibid). The Judaic tradition, reversed this order by viewing finitude as lacking/negating infinitude, while the infinitude of God created the world *ex nihilo*. The modernized conception of this relation was an amalgamation of these views:

Adopting the hierarchical framework of the Greek (the infinite is a degraded form of the finite), but the polarity of the Judaic (it is the finite rather than the infinite that participates in nothingness), the modern conception of finitude considered the finite as a fall (chute) from the infinite...

...Descartes was able to bring these two aspects together by casting the infinity of the will as the “refusal,” or “forgetting of that same finité.” Finitude was thus a “negation of a negation,” a negation of the original negation that was finite being, because it posed our limits as in principle surpassable. In this way the concept of finitude allowed for freedom from all constraints: finitude’s freedom was the freedom of negativity. And yet because this infinity of human will still remained infinitely far from the divine, “bit by bit it will be constrained to think itself as a primitive fact, as the foundation without foundation of the very humanity of man, now determined no longer as *ens creatum* or son of God, but as subject.”

It was, then, just a small step from the Christian idea of finitude to atheistic thought and the “death of God.” Atheism set itself the task of overturning this earlier Christian philosophy, of rejecting the idea of a prior infinite and interpreting finitude as originary. In this atheistic and humanist conception, finitude was the positive condition for freedom, a yearning to overcome finite limitations, an opening to the indefinite and the unlimited. (Baring, 75-76)

This “yearning to overcome limits”<sup>123</sup> showed how “atheistic thought maintained the same essential structure of the Christian idea of finitude” since:

atheistic finitude still experienced the finite as something to be overcome, it maintained the sense of the finite as a mal, a pain or

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<sup>123</sup> Perhaps this directly opposes environmental movements that seek to impose limits. For a discussion of such perspectives, see Kallis and Vansintjan, *In Defense of Degrowth* (2017).

evil; the secular idea of human infinite freedom caught within a finite form was merely a secularization of Christian sin and culpability, a development and distortion of the Judeo-Christian idea of the fall. As Birault wrote: "What then is this infinity of free finitude if not an irreligious and Promethean infinite of Man who, in making himself God, makes himself man by the transgression of sin? (ibid.)

Though the 'atheistic' evaluation attempts to split the monad, it also takes for granted that this process of splitting is itself the worship of a new fragmented absolute. This is the 'minimum idealism' that Žižek is referring to in the following:

Infinity acquires its first actual existence the moment a cell's membrane starts to function as a self-boundary...  
...Here we encounter the minimum of "idealism" which defines the notion of Self: a Self is precisely an entity without any substantial density, without any hard kernel that would guarantee its consistency. If we penetrate the surface of an organism, and look deeper and deeper into it, we never encounter some central controlling element that would be its Self, secretly pulling the strings of its organs. The consistency of the Self is thus purely virtual; it is as if it were an Inside which appears only when viewed from the Outside, on the interface-screen-the moment we penetrate the interface and endeavor to grasp the Self "substantially," as it is "in itself." It disappears like sand between our fingers. Thus materialist reductionists who claim that "there really is no self" are right, but they nonetheless miss the point. At the level of material reality (inclusive of the psychological reality of "inner experience"), there is in effect no Self: the Self is not the "inner kernel" of an organism, but a surface-effect. A "true" human Self functions, in a sense, like a computer screen: what is "behind" it is nothing but a network of "selfless" neuronal machinery. Hegel's thesis that "subject is not a substance" has thus to be taken quite literally: in the opposition between the corporeal-material process and the pure "sterile" appearance, subject is appearance itself, brought to its self-reflection; it is something that exists only insofar as it appears to itself. This is why it is wrong to search behind the appearance for the "true core" of subjectivity: behind it there is, precisely, nothing, just a meaningless natural mechanism with no "depth" to it.  
(Žižek 2006, 205-206)



In linking Heideggerian teleology with the development of the concept of Autopoiesis in the work of Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, *the particular* attempts to emancipate *the universal* from within its own *finitude*:

An autopoietic machine is a machine organized (defined as a unity) as a network of processes of production (transformation and destruction) of components that produces the components which: (i) through their interactions and transformations continuously regenerate and realize the network of processes (relations) that produced them and (ii) constitute it (the machine) as a concrete unity in the space in which they (the components) exist by specifying the topological domain of its realization as such a network.  
(Maturana, 78-79)

In *Ritual in its Own Right* (2006) Don Handelman also notices the affinities between the study of ritual and the study of Autopoiesis:

I suggest, then, that within ritual forms, autopoietic qualities of self-organization and qualities of complexity go hand in hand. Perhaps the greater the degree of interior complexity within a ritual, the greater will be its tendency to self-organization. And so, the greater the tendency to self-organization, the greater the capacity of the ritual for temporary autonomy from its sociocultural surround. Then, one step further, the greater this relative autonomy, the greater the capacity of the ritual to interiorize the distinction between itself and its surround and so to act on the latter from within itself, through the dynamics of the ritual design.  
(Handelman, 12)

In *Political Affect* (2009), we find a parallel to Žižek's spiritualist warning when, John Protevi translates Varela's hesitation regarding the use of 'Autopoiesis' on a meso/macro level, or sociopolitical, level of analysis:

I am absolutely against all extensions of autopoiesis, and also against the move to think [of] society according to models of emergence, even though, in a certain sense, you are not wrong in thinking things like that. But it is *an extremely delicate passage*. I refuse to apply autopoiesis to the social plane. That might surprise you but I do so for political reasons. History has shown that biological holism is very interesting and has produced great things, but it has always had its dark side, a black side, each time it has

allowed itself to be applied to a social model. There are always slippages toward fascism. toward authoritarian impositions. eugenics. and so on. (Varella citd. Protevi, 43, Protevi's translation, *emphasis added*)

In attempting to ascertain a theory of political affect, Protevi describes the limitations in Autopoietic theory since:

the difference lies in Varela's conception of autopoiesis as synchronically emergent which locks out the sort of diachronic emergence we need in understanding the development of bodies politic. If one could think of the formation of second-order bodies politic using dynamic systems conceptuality (even if we will never be able to model rigorously such hugely complex systems), if one could see them as resolutions or a dynamic differential field, then we would at least have the possibility of an "extremely delicate passage" in thinking of political change. But without that possibility of novel production, modeled by dynamic systems, then autopoietic social systems, once formed and mature, construct a world only in their own image and when locked in conflict with another such system, cannot ascend to an 'observer' status that would see them both as parts of a larger social system. Instead, the two conflicting systems are locked in fratricidal combat, producing a torn civic body politic, producing civil war. (Ibid.)

Protevi is understandably hesitant to speak of "Civil War" in all its radicality. This is why the question of "who and how many are 'we'?" (Braidotti, 35) and "Are 'We' in this Together?" is "crucial" (Braidotti, 156). While epistemological aporias and empathy gaps separate those who work to create and those who work to dismantle, Latour takes great pains to show how we are *not* in this together: "Thanks to America's abandonment of the climate agreement, we now know clearly what war has been declared" (Latour, 2018). 'We' may be in this predicament together, but 'we are not One'" (Braidotti, 156).

In the editor's introduction to *Universal Exception* (2006), both Žižek and Jean Baudrillard, responding to the 'collective affective resonance' emanating through the media after 9/11, advise a "time for reflection."<sup>124</sup> As per the advice given by Choudhury, perhaps we must take the time to breathe, reflect upon the

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<sup>124</sup> "The first task today is precisely not to succumb to the temptation to act, to intervene directly and change things" (Žižek 2006, 2).

myriad of biases that subsume us, and do the hard work of being conscientious in our interactions with each other and our ecology. However, having obviously failed in such endeavors of “institutional translation” (Benhabib, 17), after 9/11 we once again retreated back into fueling cycles of violence, the consequences of which continue to reverberate throughout the middle east.<sup>125</sup>

It is not difficult to find evidence of (onto-)theological war, involving implanted rituals from continually reiterated forms of coloniality; the difficulty is to disambiguate the actual theaters of war without being bogged down by obscurantism. Ironically, this metaphorical field of (onto-)theological war seems to be a subject of agreement between these two sets of ‘extremists’:

The way Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson reacted to the events of September 11, perceiving them as a sign that God had withdrawn His protection from the USA because of the sinful lives of the Americans, putting the blame on hedonist materialism, liberalism, and rampant sexuality, and claiming-that America got what it deserved? The fact that this very same condemnation of 'liberal' America as the one from the Muslim Other came from the very heart of l'Amérique profonde should give us food for thought.  
(Žižek 2002, 44)

This is why Žižek is weary of agreeing with a ‘theological war’ which may lead to an “even worse madness of religious fundamentalism” because, while ‘we’ become mired amongst ourselves, dealing with the fallout of our many squabbles amongst each other, while those privileged enough not to be mired in this obscurantism are simultaneously fueling it from the outside, as they make themselves comfortable in their lifeboats. Perhaps ‘we’ need to find ‘a third pill’<sup>126</sup>- an option from an absurd outside - to avoid getting caught in the games that we have already become so accustomed to; an option outside the dichotomy between an obedient engagement in the facade of civic life, or its wholesale demolition on the other. I propose that, rather than sustaining the purely individualist perspective from the cross upon high, this third pill comes in the form of a revolution returning to the efficacy of sacrifice from the perspective of ‘communion’. For Žižek, the ‘third pill’ is found through a repetition which loses all familiarity, yet still originates from ‘the inside’ is where the motivation may be formulated:

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<sup>125</sup> It can be said that the cycles of violence in the middle east were a continuation of the break up of “The Sublime Ottoman State” a century prior to 9/11.

<sup>126</sup> The pill metaphor comes from the 1999 movie, *The Matrix* where the ‘chosen one’ must choose between ‘a terrible truth’ or stay within the serenity of a lie.

The question of freedom, is at its most radical, the question of how this closed circle of fate can be broken. The answer, of course, is that it can be broken not because "it is not truly closed," because there are cracks in its texture, but, on the contrary, because it is overclosed, that is, because the subject's very endeavor to break out of it is included in it in advance. That is to say: since our attempts to assert our freedom and escape fate are themselves instruments of fate, the only real way to escape fate is to renounce these attempts, to accept fate as inexorable. (Oedipus' fate-killing his father, marrying his mother-was realized through his parents' very attempt to avoid it: without this attempt to avoid fate, fate cannot realize itself). (Žižek 2006, 207)

## Handshakes in Liminal Landscapes

“What the blinding Weberian formula about “the disenchantment of the world” masks is, ultimately, the fact that every disenchantment of a symbolically invested realm, such as politics and its utopias today, precipitates the enchantment of another — in the case to hand, culture and its identities” (Régis Debray, citd. in Balibar, 30)

From the influence of Weber unfinished research into *Economic Ethic of the World Religions* (citd. Ertman, 2017),<sup>127</sup> a plethora of authors have found it fruitful to explore the ways in which contemporary economic and political existence has been “influenced, shaped and underpinned by religious categories of thought” (Newman 2019, 5)<sup>128,129</sup>. As Newman argues, reemerging forms of sovereignty, global economic governance, as well as a ‘reign of technics’ (p. 148) have come to ‘fill the religious void’ that was once held by more traditional organizations:

...secularism itself retains a certain theological impulse, a trace of the sacred, which is internalised within social structures and becomes the foundation for new forms of economic and political power that seek to fill the empty place of transcendence left over from religion...

...While the formal power of religion had been displaced, modern secularism had unleashed new demons, new forms of sacred dogma and belief systems, whether in the reign of technology and scientific rationality or in new secular political religions. (Newman 2019, 155-156)

In his analysis of the Italian philosopher Adriono Tilgher, Emilio Gentile also refers to this aporia when discussing “the religions of Humanity, Progress, and Science, ‘through which Western civilization attempted to fill the vacuum

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<sup>127</sup> See Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2001).

<sup>128</sup> “All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development- in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver- but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts. The exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology” (Schmitt, 31).

<sup>129</sup> See Emilio Gentile's *Politics as Religion* (2006) and Saul Newman's *Political Theology* (2019),

left in the spirit by the decline of Christianity” (citd. Gentile, 10). With their own versions of symbolism, mythology, ritual, and sets of commandments, Gentile highlights how the secular religions of nation, state, race, class, and party became the new civic religions of collective faith, loyalty, and devotion. These sentiments are evoked regardless of whether there is an ideology of nationalism, socialism, democracy, totalitarianism, fascism and/or communism that is at play (Gentile 48, 62). With reference to the work of Carl Schmitt and Spinoza, Balibar adds to this point where, for both these thinkers:

...secular models of political authority (notably those founded on the law as a more or less complete subordination of the exception to the norm) derive their meaning and symbolic power from religious models. (Balibar, XXIII)

Here, however, we may reiterate a Derridian warning which stresses caution about engaging with analyses that subsume all variables into the realm of the ‘religious’<sup>130</sup> that runs parallel to our above discussion of fragmenting absolute positions. The use of the word ‘religion’ is an instance of “mondialatinization” (globalatinization) for it “still depends on its Roman and Christian sources” and “is, properly speaking, untranslatable into other languages and cultures. The word imposes a “Romano- Christian” code on everything it is used to designate” (Balibar, 27). This rift, between the secular and the religious/sacred, obscure how “doctrines” of secularism - for which there are more than one (Asad, 191), have:

“by no means abolished the theological antitheses intrinsic to the Christian tradition, which it both criticizes and preserves; rather, it has contented itself with displacing and amplifying them.”  
(Balibar, 31)

Balibar notices how attempts to subsume all manner of life and culture into the idea of ‘the religious’, exemplified by Weber’s analyses, is the contraposition of the secular attempt, exemplified by the work of Clifford Geertz (2000), to subsume ‘the religious’ into the category of the ‘cultural’. That is, either there is a secular theology that was always already present, or it has been permeating into other realms of social life like politics and economics as an attempt to ‘fill in’ aporia:

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<sup>130</sup> “the category “religion” is itself transformative, such that importing it as a second-order category (in scholastic, legal, and other discourses) transforms the society into which it has been introduced, effectively transforming other cultural systems into “religions” (Josephson-Storm, 12).

we must take seriously the hypothesis that the “return of the religious”—under the form of a growing affirmation of collective identities of the religious sort (for all manner of mutually antithetical ends), to the detriment of identities assigned or recognized by the state, in competition with them, or seizing them from within—is a consequence of the decline of “collective subjectivations” that were elicited by earlier forms of political conflictuality or civil conflict. (Balibar, XXIV)

The most startling account by Balibar is with regards to the many real world examples of a “theologico-political complex” make it evident how warnings about spiritualist “resuscitations” have already been nudging us “from the state of law toward the state of exception:”

Israel is attempting to build a “secular” (or modern) state based on the religious identity of its dominant community; the United States has its “manifest destiny” challenged from outside and from inside, but also sees a new wave of politicization of the faith (in particular Protestant Evangelical revivalism); Algeria suffers a lethal conflict between religious fundamentalism and military secularism, which perhaps expresses only part of the crisis of the so-called Arab-Islamic identity; Iran oscillates between moments of forced westernization and moments of “religious revolution” combining anti-imperialism and clericalism; the Indian subcontinent combines a violent conflict of monotheistic and polytheistic cultures with a specific crisis of “national secularism”; Europe as such witnesses a renewal of the idea of the “Christian roots” of its cultural identity because of the postcolonial confrontation with Islam but also the divergent ways of instituting the relationship between church and state in its different “nations” (which to a large extent became autonomous entities in the premodern era around the solution that was found for this issue, deemed the “Westphalian compromise,” each becoming in a sense an “exception” to an absent rule) drifting from the state of law toward the state of exception. (Balibar, 113)

Habermas’ “proposal that religious language should be translated into secular if it is to qualify for the political sphere” (Asad, 5), reminiscent of Spinoza’s admonition to create an “areligious” civic sphere (Josephson-Storm, 69), fails to escape the problematic of incommensurability and bad faith:

...what obliquely makes the encounter of different religions possible, or allows them jointly to cultivate a “free conversation” in the public realm, is the introduction or intervention there of a supplementary element that is, as such, a-religious. (Balibar, 53)

Feminist perspectives, with regards to studies of comparative mythology and narratology, may provide one way of bridging the gap between this theological/narrative aporia between the logos and the mythos.<sup>131</sup> Considering how, out of the traditions of painting in caves, and storytelling while gathering around a fire, can perhaps be said to be some of the oldest iterations of ritual practice, these questions ask to what degree can long standing archetypes within a narrative structure be changed, as well as, what is the extent of their universal applicability. For example, writers like Valerie Estelle Frankel (2010), Maureen Murdock (1990) and Clarissa Pinkola Estes (1992) create work that attempt to formulate ‘alternatives’ to the conceivably masculine bias of the monomyth, as has been popularized by Joseph Campbell (2017); they create their own sentiments with regards to age old, and seemingly solidified mythological accounts. These imaginative visions are in the process of taking from a symbolic realm that is already given, reformulating it through an individual subjectivity, before being recast back into a collective conversation, except with re-tuned archetypes and protagonists that are not confined to any one tradition, but create their own tradition nonetheless. Reminiscent of the question of motivation when participating in civic life, narrativization (mythos) has the potential of transforming a ‘his-story’ to a ‘collective subjectivity’ in the form of an ‘our-journey’.<sup>132</sup> <sup>133</sup> This narrative of rite is shared by a wide variety of traditions<sup>134</sup> including Confucius where “a mythic past” is “in service of a new ideal” (Fingarette, 68). Yet, given the Žižek’s warnings of the totalitarian tendencies of collective narrativization from “resuscitated traditions,” combined with the problems of bad faith, incommensurability, and the Derrida’s skepticism with regards to narrativist claims regarding origins, perhaps a fully sensible and articulable narrative is asking too much.

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<sup>131</sup> See Jung, *The Collected Works of CG Jung - Volume 11: Psychology and Religion* (1979).

<sup>132</sup> “Few men enjoy prolonged travel; it disrupts all habit and endlessly jolts each prejudice” (Yourcenar, 122).

<sup>133</sup> On a journey to Berlin, Kierkegaard remarks, “Among the learned there are various opinions as to which seat in a diligence is the most comfortable. My Ainsicht (viewpoint) is that it is a misery for the whole crowd” (137, Bretall).

<sup>134</sup> See, for example, Wilson’s *Research is Ceremony* (2008).



The magic of ritual is that an outstretched hand invites the participation of the other into an almost immediately apprehended handshake interaction:

The word *li* originally meant holy ritual or sacrificial ceremony, and it is used by Confucius to mean more broadly behavior patterns established and accepted as appropriate through the history by a community, including what we call manners, etiquette, ceremonies, customs, rules of propriety, etc. The metaphor of holy ritual serves as a reminder that the most ordinary activities in our life can also be ritualistic or ceremonial, and it is the ceremonial that sets human activities apart from those of animals. The way we greet each other, a handshake, for instance, is ritualistic, for it is not a mere physical touching of hands. We stand up to greet our guests, and walk them to the door as they leave. These are rituals because, from the point of view of efficiency, they can be spared in most cases. (Shen, 65)

Like a popular Chinese expression, “there is no why” (不为什么), at root, this gesture provides a sense of coherence not tied to any form of coercion, demands for explanation, or even any need for fully articulated narratives; the outstretched hand *almost immediately* opens a *liminal space* that is neither automatic, nor fully creative. How the other participates or whether the other participates at all, does not question the sensibility of the act. The ritual stands at the precipice between “dichotomies such as the secular and the sacred, the thisworldly and the otherworldly” (Chow, 146), for the act itself is an unavoidable and implicit acknowledgment of at least some form of ‘communion’:

The practice of ritual propriety, however, is ambiguous and leaves maximum space for uniqueness and creativity. A handshake in itself does not specify what is agreed upon, and yet a certain trust and mutual recognition can be established through it. Not only can the meaning carried by a handshake be richer than any agreement on a principle, it will not lose mutuality for the sake of having an agreement, nor will it lack emotional content for the sake of retaining rationality (Shen, 67)

We can see how this magic of ritual is alluded to even if there is no actual participation by referring to Habermas’ compelling illustration regarding the ancientness of *recognizing the unexplainable void of existence* in a section entitled *A Hypothesis Considering the Evolutionary Meaning of Rites* (Habermas 2017, 23). Here, Habermas describes how, though most primates have the ability

to refer to objects *in the world*, the ability to maintain a shared symbolic reference to an *unexplainable void*, which regards the question of existence itself, is perhaps a symbolic reference particular to humans. Similarly, Confucius also talked “in terms of restoring an ancient harmony; but the practical import of his teaching was to lead men to look for new ways of interpreting and refashioning a local tradition in order to bring into being a new, universal order to replace the contemporary disorder” (Fingarette, 60).

Through a “violent break to reveal clearly the nexus of the individual to society” (Bergson, 18),<sup>135</sup> an individual undergoes a ceremonial rite of passage to leave their intersubjective social world and gain *their own particular entry* into the (universally) shared symbolic reference to the crisis of meaning which the whole of society itself has been thrown into. Meaning, or at least the ability to allude to even the most minimal sensibilities, *must come under crisis* for a protagonist to arrive at a crossroads where a decision needs to be made. After having strived so hard to turn around, escape the cave and discover the sun, a decision needs to be made about whether to return. Only when the protagonist of a ceremonial rite of passage recognizes a “shared corporeal vulnerability” (Simplican, 43) with the rest of their tribe, are they then confronted with this question of how they should proceed, or what kind of life they should live. Confucius extends this individualistic theme of crisis, like the moment of doubt on the cross, by alluding to how “social crisis” is an “essential ground of a civilized political-social unity” as well (Fingarette, 64). This critical juncture, coinciding with the Confucian emphasis on processes rather than turning points, is that *both* the individual and society are “never actually in a position to choose;” that is, both the individual and ‘collective’ protagonists are always only ever operating *from inside the cave*.

Though such rites are perhaps particular to humans, they simultaneously allow a collective identity to pull up an empty seat for *unmentionable ghosts* - which may allow for what Latour is asking for when he talks about the importance of having a seat for the “geo-” or ‘nonhuman’ contributions at the political table. In a similar way, these rituals are how we can create spaces for recognizing one another's burdens of trace, the haunting nightmares of history.

Even if there are actual non-human contributions that can be evoked, any realizations, when translated back into an articulable realm of narrative, become once again steeped in a slew of preconscious biases, and even

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<sup>135</sup> Bergson also makes a biological comparison here: “The component cell of an organism, on becoming momentarily conscious, would barely have outlived the wish to emancipate itself when it would be recaptured by necessity” (Bergson, 14).

calculative designs. Just as when we have a dream, and we awake to *tell someone*, or *write it down*, in the act of articulation itself we are *creating a narrative* that may not have actually taken place within the dream that is likely much more chaotic and incomprehensible. Though it is still necessary to create some form of linearity in order to be able to communicate ideas even to ourselves, perhaps the problem lies too much in such interferences with the sensibility that arises out of the play within the realm of liminality between dichotomous, as evoked by Donna Haraway's question, "Why should our bodies end at the skin?" (Haraway, 178), lucidly echoed in the work of Proust:<sup>136</sup>

...when I awoke at midnight, not knowing where I was, I could not be sure at first who I was; I had only the most rudimentary sense of existence, such as may lurk and flicker in the depths of an animal's consciousness; I was more destitute of human qualities than the cave-dweller; but then the memory, not yet of the place in which I was, but of various other places where I had lived, and might now very possibly be, would come like a rope let down from heaven to draw me up out of the abyss of not-being, from which I could never have escaped by myself: in a flash I would traverse and surmount centuries of civilisation, and out of a half-visualised succession of oil-lamps, followed by shirts with turned-down collars, would put together by degrees the component parts of my ego. (Proust, 7-8)

Within this space of liminality, rituals have the potential to employ 'empty variables', for example through an invocation of the ancestors, calls by other non-human entities to participate, or even as an interpretational gap itself. An apt example of this interpretational gap can be found in the medieval political theological of Ernst Kantorowicz who, while explicitly staying away from the moniker of 'political theory' in favor of 'political theology', explicates the official/divine/jurisdictional duties of *The King's Two Bodies* (1997):

The King has two Capacities, for he has two Bodies, the one whereof is a "Body natural, consisting of natural Members as every other Man has, and in this he is subject to Passions and Death as other Men are; the other is a Body politic, and the Members thereof are his Subjects, and he and his Subjects together compose the Corporation, as Southcote said, and he is incorporated with them, and they with him, and he is the Head, and they are the Members,

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<sup>136</sup> Proust also serves as a reminder for the critiques made of sedentary, bourgeois leisure time, See Adorno 2005, 21.

and he has the sole Government of them; and this Body is not subject to passions as the other is, nor to Death, for as to this Body the King never dies, and his natural Death is not called in our Law, the Death of the King, but the Demise of the King, not signifying by the Word (Demise) that the Body politic of the King is dead, but that there is a Separation of the two Bodies, and that the Body politic is transferred and conveyed over from the Body natural now dead, or now removed from the Dignity royal, to another Body natural. So that it signifies a Removal of the Body politic of the King of this Realm from one Body natural to another. (Citd. Kantorowicz, 13).

Though the symbolic transference of kingliness is not physically 'conveyed over' from one body to the next, and even if we truly believe that there is some spiritual connection to the ancestors, we must remember that all these symbolisms are still always articulated from *within* the human-centric play of language, a fragmentation of the absolute.

As if repeating the same word over and over until it sounds like a music piece, Žižek also finds the 'third pill' within a 'sublation' or 'idealization' - 'freedom' is found within the repetition of the old; 'the truth' is found not by separating it from falsehood, but from seeing through ideology itself. Truth is found in the realization, and participation of repetition, but in a way that renders what has been repeated almost unrecognizable and original:

God has to die twice, first as real, then as symbolic; first in Judaism, then in Christianity. In Judaism, the God of the real survives as Word, as the virtual-dead Other whose specter is kept alive by the ritual performance of his subjects; in Christianity, this virtual Other itself dies. In Judaism, the God perceived directly as real dies; in Christianity, the God who is unconscious dies. The passage from paganism to Judaism is one of sublimation (the dead god survives as the symbolic Other); the death of Christ is not sublimation, in other words it is not the death of the real God who is resurrected in the Holy Ghost as the symbolic Other, like Julius Caesar who returns as sublimated in the symbolic title "Caesar". (Žižek 2012, 93)

Only after Christ's atheistic consideration, asking God why he had been forsaken, could he raise his hands to *commend his spirit*. Only after seeing the absolute as fragmented can one choose to, nevertheless, wholly and non-mechanistically participate in the shared ritual that evokes subjectivity. In the flow between one monad to another, "the time of freeze in-between two

deaths" which forever differs meaning within a symbolic realm of the liminal, yet still becomes a fictional universality, we were "never actually in a position to choose" (Žižek 2008, 186). Just as the sublation of the name of Caesar, after the death of the first, it is a reiteration of universality while also revoking the original meaning by creating a particular and wholly new relationship to the whole.

Returning to the discussion of biopolitics, where individuals no longer "interpellate" into subjects, Žižek makes the point "from within" once more: that regardless of any attempt of 'governmentality' (*dispositif*) to "regulate and administer individuals' bare life", there is an "X" which emerges after the subject has become totally desubjectivized individual, revealing "the unfathomable void that ontologically precedes subjectivization" (Žižek 2011, 418; and Žižek 2012, 985-986). That is, "it is the very desubjectivation of a living being, its subordination to a *dispositif*, which subjectivizes it" (*ibid.*). Subjectivity is identified by a simultaneous contestation of itself while a 'collective other' entangles conceived familiarities of what is inside and outside into doubt. A madness is at the root and without this recognition of fragmentation, there cannot be a renegotiation about what is 'inside and outside' or included and excluded within its subjectivity.

However, the *New Testament* cannot evoke a 'spirit of desecularization' without the existence of, and *creative negation* of the old. As such, before having returned to the Kingdom of Heaven, Christ utters, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46), which signals that, after the rupture of doubt/madness experienced on the cross, there is indeed a Word of Reunion, and a return to an 'institution' of ritual. Thus, Christian revelation *did not*, as Girard argues, do away with the ritual of sacrifice. While 'turn the cheek' is a death of sacredness itself, it is also instilling a spirit of rebirth of a tradition of staving off resentment, a forgiveness through communion.<sup>137</sup> And as such, in a capitalist economy where time is money, the sacrifice comes in the form of a time *not* subject to calculative rationality.

To seek inspiration in one's own traditions in such a way as to reveal a humanizing and harmonizing interpretation of for the conflictual present. "He who is reanimating the Old can gain knowledge of the New is indeed fit to be called a teacher. (Analects 2:11, cited Fingarette 68)<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> See Shun, Kwong-loi's *Resentment and Forgiveness in Confucian Thought* (2014) for a discussion of the distinctions between Christian and Confucian ideals of forgiveness.

<sup>138</sup> "子曰。溫故而知新、可以為師矣" (Analects 2:11)

Confucianism's present day (nationalistic) resurgence, and why there seems to be a different ideal of Confucianism for every age,<sup>139</sup> perhaps has to do with a tenet to find *congruity within* the present time and space. China's successes in response to 'Western' hegemony, perhaps influenced by *Confucian* ideals of finding and becoming congruous to the already present neoliberal order, rather than resisting it like perhaps found in some Islamic responses to 'the West', reinforces the weight of ritual over any form of cognitive apprehension. Whereas even the protestant ethic reserves a holy-Sunday for rest, the *Confucian* ongoing ceremony of work, as carried forth by Japan and China, is a realization that, given a state of perpetual global competition, sacredness is found in everyday work itself. The secret to China's growth is that, whereas the 'Western' worker clocks out at 5, in China and Japan work is synonymous with living - a perhaps, "late-capitalist" idea which has returned to the west in the form of global austerity. This is why Feng (2016) argues that Max Weber was mistaken to discount the economic potential of Confucianism in comparison to the Protestant work ethic.<sup>140</sup><sup>141</sup> The world is moving closer to the Confucian realization of capitalism, a realization that competing in a globally interconnected marketplace requires a gradual dissolution of the distinction between the sacred and profane, or 'working' and 'non-working' hours, rather than moving towards a Protestant ethic which suggests the importance of rest, through perhaps a 'sacred' holy Sunday reserved for communion. Just like how employers are becoming increasingly interested in the concept of "emotional intelligence" in a space that is fundamentally designed to extract surplus capital, communion is supposed to be achieved at the workplace itself.

To seek inspiration in one's own traditions in such a way as to reveal a humanizing and harmonizing interpretation of for the conflictual present. "He who is reanimating the Old can gain knowledge of the New is indeed fit to be called a teacher.  
(Analects 2:11, cited Fingarette 68)<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> For an account of these transformations, see Peter Bol's *Neo-Confucianism in History* (2008).

<sup>140</sup> See Deng, Fang. *Is Max Weber Wrong?* (2016).

<sup>141</sup> See Ertman (2017) for a discussion of Weber's attempt to map theologies to economics.

<sup>142</sup> "子曰。溫故而知新、可以為師矣" (Analects 2:11)

Though taking into consideration Derrida's skepticism regarding claims about primordialism is vital, the linguistic epiphany of a 'post-structuralist event' cannot be seen as mutually exclusive from the *gradual aggregation* derived from the structuralist *sensibility of repeating gestures*. The hypothesis is that within this liminal realm of social construction is precisely where the magical flexibility of tradition can be evoked.<sup>143</sup> Rites, as described by Habermas through Durkheim, were undertaken in order to cement a particular subjectivity only so far as they may reverberate back into the synergized subjectivity of the whole tribe. Instead, we are stuck in the rituals of endlessly particularized subjectivities, while we sit back, wonder why and lay witness to the breakdown of social structures. Since this vestigial camp-theology provides for us materially, there is no reason to return to the cave and take on the excessive emotional labor of tending to any commitments that go above and beyond, especially when the commitments are to *strangers* - a process which turns us all into camels enslaved to one another. For an ever increasing number of wayfarers, worshiping the idols of the wasteland is ever more appealing and more credible than giving up one's life to the noble lies (universal fictions) of caves.

On the one hand, the various masks and renditions of historical trauma and 'terrestrial' climate insecurities, are manifested within the disillusionment arising from an inability for many of our tribe(s) to wholly process our contemporary insecurities; the 'trauma' that contemporary societies are continually reiterating comes from of a failure for the members of these tribes to wholly perform rites and *return to their caves*. Tribes that lack communal ways of processing do not see the wasteland as a place for pilgrimage that must be eternally returned to, like a pilgrimage to Mecca or a vision quest through the wilderness. Instead, society is built on the periphery of the desert as only vestigial (economic) responsibilities of bare life are taken up but responsibilities that are 'not one's own' are relinquished. For these societies, it would make sense to listen to the story of how, when a disciple of Confucius asks why a poor sheep should be sacrificed, the Master replies "You love the sheep, but I love the Ceremony"<sup>144</sup> (Fingarette, 77). Within this madness, collectively experienced by society through ritual, is where we can perhaps bring society together. On the other hand, in tribes that *do* have rites, and have already been creating '*resuscitated*' traditions, they either have too little effect on the aforementioned 'rite-less' societies, or they if they do have an effect, it is because they too easily lead to forming absolutist mindsets that affirm

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<sup>143</sup> "Preferences are not primordial givens; they are shaped, partly by education and acculturation, and partly in response to institutional arrangements" (Shapiro 2006, 90).

<sup>144</sup> "子貢欲去告朔之餼羊。子曰：「賜也，爾愛其羊，我愛其禮」 (Analects, 3:17)

alternative overly-regulated social-structures, exemplified perhaps through conscripted military service.

A question for Confucius that is still relevant, is whether the traditions that are actively in the process of being created are congruent with a reverence towards the ancestors, and with the present being lived. Within the abyss of endless contingency, what is lasting may become ever more valuable, and we must make sure to not let our insecurities be the ultimate arbiter of what stays and what is let go. However, Confucius' thought cannot help to distinguish between the rituals of 'boy scouts and Hitler youth' without paying tribute to a Christian question asking whether the rituals we are participating in, innovating, and creating are congruent with a messianic time as well. This is the question that all of us who design our rituals today, the quotidian inscribers of ritual in everyday living, through participation in social media, and the coding of software, must ask ourselves. The hope is that, through a post-apocalyptic reverence and the ritualized cultivation of 'our' collective *sensitivity* to the liminal realm of the preconscious, the many lost tribes of the desert may finally be able to complete their rites.

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