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STASIS AND THE SUBJECT/CITIZEN

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Hegel famously argues that the ancient Greeks did not have a notion of the subject because they lacked a conception of self-consciousness. There is, nonetheless, something enticing in Hegel's notion of the Greek subject as lacking self-consciousness by Hegel. In particular, the lack of a reliance on reflection for the determination of human agency is intimately linked to, even inextricable from, the conception of the citizen. What the ancient Greek "subject" may lack in self-reflexivity, thereby never arriving at the idea of transcendental subjectivity, it compensates for with a decisively political insistence on human action and thought.

The connection between the subject and the citizen is important because, as Étienne Balibar has shown in a series of texts, starting with "Citizen Subject," the two concepts are actually linked in modernity, both in terms of their genealogy and in terms of the political commitments they entail.[1] In the context of trying to answer the question "What comes after the subject?" it may, then, be useful to remember the historical specificity and artificiality, even artifice, of the wrenching apart of the subject and the citizen. It may even lead us to wonder whether the separation between subject and citizen is tenable, especially when we note the ways in which violence is inscribed in affecting this separation. To raise these questions, then, the Greek subject's lack of "self-consciousness" is indeed a fruitful starting point. I propose to do so by organizing some thoughts about the subject departing from the Greeks.

Perhaps the greatest examples of a conjoining of the subject and the citizen in Greek context appear in the tragedies. But I would like here to focus on a different example that is arguably of equal importance and no less dramatic. I am thinking of Solon's law against neutrality,

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or, as I prefer to call it, the law of stasis. I cite it here in full as it appears in Aristotle's *Athenian Constitution:*

> And as he saw that the state was often in conflict [στασιάζουσαν], while some citizens would let things take their course through idleness [διὰ τὴν ῥᾳθυμίαν], he laid down a special law to deal with them, enacting that whoever did not take a stand in a stasis [στασιαζούσης τῆς πόλεως] was to lose his citizenship and to be expelled from the polis. (8.5, translation modified)[2]

We should remember that, according to the tradition, Solon's is the first-ever democratic constitution. This peculiar law stands out in the Solonian code as conjoining the way that one is in the world with the conditions for citizenship. If one's being in the world precludes political participation, that is, if a subject refuses to engage in the conflict of stasis that is constitutive of being a citizen, then the subject will be stripped of its formal citizenship and expelled from the polis.

Note that the Solonian conception of the democratic subject/citizen is described almost in the dramatic terms. The democratic polis is like a stage. The conflict or stasis between the parties takes place on this stage. The actors are subject/citizens occupying the polis as a stage of the drama. Simultaneously, there is an actor on the side of the stage, lounging about and refraining from moving to center stage. The law of stasis indicates the imperative for the actor to position him or herself at that part of the stage where the stasis unfolds. There is no drama without the agon that unfolds on the stage.[3] In this conception, democracy is the participation by the subject in the agon unfolding on the political stage.

Now, such a drama does not conform to the usual way in which we understand democracy. If an off-the-shelf definition of democracy is required, then one usually refers to the two proper names of the compound word: democracy indicates that the people (*demos*) hold power or rule (*kratos*). I do not need to belabor the well-rehearsed difficulties of this "self-evident" definition of democracy. I can mention indicatively questions such as the following: Is the demos in ancient Athens really the same as the people in modernity? Does the "direct" democracy of Athens have any bearing on the representative democracy prevalent today? Are those who, for whatever de facto reason, excluded from participation, no longer part of the demos? And so on. Nonetheless, there seems to be an extraordinary consensus about the

importance for the definition of democracy as the people (however they are determined) being in a position to rule. In other words, there is a double assumption in how we automatically come to understand that compound word "democracy." First, the privileged term is *demos.* And, second, *kratos* refers to constituted power.

The scene described by the law of stasis does not abide by these assumptions. The actors do not form a ruling people—if any notion of the people is implicated here, it is one of unruly opponents who engage in fighting and disagreements. Even more important, it seems that Solon's law of stasis profoundly disturbs the double assumption I outlined above. First, the emphasis shifts to *kratos.* Second, *kratos* here indicates the unfolding of a conflict in which someone must prevail—it is not about constituted power but about overpowering. Nicole Loraux, in her seminal work, *The Divided City,* has paid close attention to this meaning of *kratos* for an understanding of democracy as well as the political.

A lot of my work is also based on the double assumption in Solon's law of stasis.[4] What I call agonistic democracy departs precisely from this double assumption—shifting the emphasis to *kratos* while simultaneously understanding *kratos* as conflict. Such an assumption poses a significant difficulty, or a problematic. Let me outline it with recourse to the theatrical scene of Solon's law of stasis.

The shift from the meaning of democracy as the people-rule to that of the affirmation of an inherent conflict or opposition is possible only if we can distinguish between the two meanings of *kratos.* Differently put, such an understanding of agonistic democracy will only be possible if we can draw a distinction between constituted power and the conflictual element that sustains the definition of the subject as citizen. Further, to draw this distinction, we need to answer at least two questions: What are the qualitative differences in the violence implied in the two senses of *kratos*? And how are these two different senses of violence related to each other? I will tackle these questions and their implications for a conception of the subject by examining the drama of Solon's law of stasis. Each question will be described as an Act in the drama of the law of stasis.

Before doing so, a clarification is necessary. What I call agonistic democracy—shifting the emphasis to *kratos,* and also distinguishing this sense of *kratos* from senses of rule and constituted power—is

indebted to a series of thinkers of agonistic democracy such as Bonnie Honig, Chantal Mouffe, and James Tully. And yet there is one important difference. What characterizes all these accounts—their many differences notwithstanding—is a commitment to reading agonistic democracy in conjunction with sovereignty. Agonistic democracy, in these construals, either supplements, or complements, or checks sovereignty. Conversely, my definition of agonistic democracy is based on a different assumption, which is, to repeat, a distinction between *kratos* as rule or sovereignty, on the one hand, and *kratos* as conflict or stasis, on the other. Agonistic democracy, as I designate it, distinguishes between sovereignty and democracy, *and* inquires about their relation.

ACT I: EXILE, DEATH, AND A SHOT BEHIND THE BACK

How does the drama unfold in this scene of stasis presented by Solon's law? A first Act concerns the citizen who has been expelled. Our "slacker" hero places himself in a particular relation to the community that is an affront to the way that the community forms itself. His slackness contradicts participation. It is important that slackness is not a characteristic that can be separated from the experience of relating to the community. It does not refer to something that is independent of the situation. Rather, both slackness and participation are attitudes that one can practice in their own singular way and given their own singular circumstances. They do not refer to an essential feature of the person; they are rather a predicate of the person's engagement with others. It is significant to note, then, that there is an important difference between the citizen conceived as a singular person, as opposed to being an individual. Singularity entails a praxis thereby referring to the other, to the fellow citizens. Conversely, the individual in Greek is referred to as *idios*, or *idiotes*, which means a private person. Given that these substantives provide the root for the word "idiot," the pejorative sense in *idios* and *idiotes* is unmistakable. An "idiot" is one who does not take account of the other.

The distinction between the singularity of the engaged subject and the individual leads to a further distinction about violence, which is crucial for this static scene. Being banished and losing his citizenship, our hero suffers from a kind of violence exercised. This violence

can be understood in two, significantly different ways. First, it can be a violence that dislocates the person. It can be a violence that exiles the citizen and that positions the person as an *idiotes*, as someone whose essential characteristic is to be preoccupied by his private interest. Differently put, this is a violence that denies its victim singularity. It exercises itself by assigning an attribute—it ascribes a value—to its victim. Such violence ultimately supports the power (*kratos*) of those who rule. A second kind of violence can be interpreted as simply denying citizenship based on the worth of the individual. This is much closer to the Athenian conception, given that Athenian citizenship is based on the worth of one's actions.[5] "Worth" here is not to be understood as a moral value, nor is it associated with a discourse of exceptionalism.[6] Rather, worth denotes the way that participation articulates itself in action. In other words, it is a violence that allows for the unfolding of stasis or for the unfolding of *kratos* as conflict. Here, singularity is retained.

The distinctions between the two ways of conceiving subjectivity and violence are intimately connected. The first violence performs a kind of murder; it is a death of the citizen, in the sense that the value attributed to the citizen circumscribes his actions in advance. Conversely, the second kind of violence is remedial. The banished hero retains the potential to act in such a way as to participate in a worthy manner, and hence as to be permitted to return to the city. Act I, then, is about the choice between these two possibilities: violence or stasis. It forges a distinction between the actions of a subject that opposes participation and the actions of a subject that produce an agonistic sense of democratic participation.

* * *

Is it possible to transfer this Act of the ancient drama to a modern setting? To do so, we need to consider the modern subject. There are numerous well-known conceptions of the subject in modernity. We can identify the subject, following Hegel, with the creation of the self-reflexive individual and hence with the creation of a space of reason wherein the public sphere operates.[7] Or, in Heidegger's manner, we can locate the subject as an onto-theological remnant whose metaphysical heritage needs to be destroyed.[8] Althusser recognizes that the subject is the center of interpolation and hence of the formation of

ideology.[9] For Hannah Arendt, the subject remains crucial for the possibility of overcoming the instrumentalism of violence and affirming the human capacity to create something new.[10] Agamben insists that the subject is riven between a purely physical body and a political body, which produces sovereign power.[11] And so on—this list can easily be extended. The common denominator of all these perspectives—their huge differences notwithstanding—is that the determination of the subject always entails the political. The "political" here does not signify simply formal or institutional organizations such as governments and political parties; rather, the "political" in the broadest sense refers to how people relate to each other—be it reflexively, or in terms of a fundamental ontology of the Dasein, through ideology or through *vita activa,* or simply by being subjected to the various biopolitical mechanisms. The subject is never *a* subject. The subject exists as a plurality. There is a subject so long as there are others around it.

Given that the modern subject is inherently related to others, just like the ancient citizen, we can say, using the vocabulary from Solon, that participation is an inherent possibility of the subject. The modern subject *can* and *must* participate with others in order to be a subject. From this perspective, the disfranchised citizen appears as the death of the subject. Both are confronted by a violence that puts them as well as their community in peril. The drama, then, asks: What comes after this threat is realized? Or, differently put, what comes *after* the subject? Viewed from this perspective, there are two ways of approaching the question about what comes after the subject, depending on how we understand the "after."[12]

The first determination of the "after" consists in understanding it in a temporal manner. What is it that succeeds the subject? What emerges in its place when the subject is no longer operative? This approach assumes that the subject is an individual clearly separable from other individuals. The individual is in control of its own mental and affective processes that unfold in temporal succession. Such an individual would always need to be reconnected to the community of other subjects. For instance, Kant argues that every individual is dependent upon a realm of morality—the "kingdom of ends," as Kant calls it in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Kant 2002). The moral realm, which is common to every human being at all places and throughout time, is ultimately responsible for the bonds of society, as

Kant shows in "The Doctrine of Right" (Kant 1996). The combination of the epistemic independence of the subject and its dependence on a transcendent morality define the Kantian subject as autonomous. This approach disavows in advance the political import of the subject's existence. The individual as it exists in a temporal continuum, within which it can control its thoughts and emotions, is *ab initio* isolated and it can only come into a community through something such as a "kingdom of ends" that is always beyond existence, since it transcends spatio-temporal determinations. In other words, the political is provided with a basis that is beyond experience and which disavows the singularity of the individual.

The so-called death of the subject and similar expressions usually refer to this conception of the subject in modern thought.[13] They express the dissatisfaction that is a consequence of the problems that follow from the separation of the subject's existence from the basis of the political. All the essays collected in *Who Comes After the Subject?*—the predecessor of this collection of essays—express this dissatisfaction in one way or another.[14] But after taking this dissatisfaction with the subject as individual seriously, then the question does indeed arise: "What does come after the subject?" This arises from the recognition that if we could go past the subject—however that subject is conceived—where would that leave the others who are a constitutive part of every subject? The death of the subject threatens the elimination of the other as a necessary accompaniment to each individual subject. The desire to "kill" the individual subject because it disavows singularity threatens inadvertently the other who is of necessity a constitutive part of the subject. In other words, to say that something comes after the subject would point to a space past or beyond the political interrelations that exist between a subject and those around it. The death of the subject is the dearth of the political. The death of the subject, then, recalls the first kind of violence that was exercised, according to our reading of Solon's special law: in both cases, violence is exercised on an individual in such a way as to eliminate its community. Thus, the "after" in its first construal actually signifies a violent gesture that eliminates not only a single individual but also all the individuals around it. From this perspective, the death of the subject does not merely exhibit a desire to overcome a specifically modern conception of subjectivity, but also a deeper death drive—a predilection to

thanatopolitics. Given that such a death drive articulates itself in opposition to participation, it is also a drive against the agonistic sense of democracy. Instead, it works always in the service of, or in order to justify, the rule of constituted power (of *kratos* as sovereignty).[15]

The second way consists in understanding the "after" in relational terms. The question, then, is not one of superseding the subject, or even simply about what is implied alongside the subject. Rather, it consists in asking how the relations of the subject to others unfold. Differently put, it consists in the recognition that the subject is never one but always plural. Consequently, such a recognition insists on the relations between the subject and its other(s). The question of the subject is both an ontological and a political question—or, it is *simultaneously* ontological and political. From the moment that the subject is defined in a political manner, it finds itself in relation. A subject is always *with* others, whose presence, moreover, undermines the clear borders that demarcate one subject as a distinct individual in space and time. The subject is always plural. Or, stated from an ontological perspective, there is never being as such; rather, being is always *being with.* Such a relational ontology of the subject entails that the other is always "after" the individual, an other always follows the subject like a double.[16]

We should not forget the romantic and gothic plot according to which the double is inherently threatening. With this in mind, the question of violence again returns. The presence of others both enables the construction of a notion of the subject, and yet at the same time it challenges it.[17] The idea of a universal neighborly love that eliminates enmity is an illusion because, as Freud ponders, what if the other wants to kill me?[18] It is important to recognize that this threat is not self-evidently negative; rather, it is constitutive of intersubjective relations. There is a distinction as to how violence is constructed. If the presence of the other is understood as being part of the stasis that makes participation possible, then the threat of the other can function in a positive way. The other is the co-participant in the conflicts that make community possible. This is not to deny the reality of the treat. Rather, the threat is the necessary risk for an agonistic democracy based on stasis. We cannot have stasis without that inherent threat. The violence then described in this second sense of the "after" is like the effects of stasis that we saw in Solon's special law. It denotes

the second sense of *kratos* as conflict—which, as I indicated earlier, is one of the constitutive characteristics of agonistic democracy as I define it.

We have arrived, then, at a distinction in this scene: whereas the death of the subject denotes a thanatopolitics that puts the subject no less than its community in peril while simultaneously asserting sovereign power, stasis is the condition of the possibility of the ontologico-political constitution of the subject as being with and hence the condition of the possibility of agonistic democracy. The drama about the actor in Solon's law of stasis unfolds around this distinction.

* * *

Can we discover a modern instance of Act I of this drama that stages the stark alternative between violence and stasis? For this, we need to turn to Walter Benjamin. The reason is not only that his own notion of a dialectics at a standstill resonates with stasis—we will return to this point later. In addition, Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" can be read as a meditation on the subject. A major insight of the "Work of Art" essay is that experience and technology, the subject's being and the instruments or means that are part of its being, are interconnected.[19] The fact that one is and the way that one is can never be separated. Differently put, and recalling the vocabulary from the Solonian law, the subject exists so long as it participates in the world using the means at its disposal. Benjamin calls these means "technology." Technology is intimately linked to sociality.

The link between the subject, technology, and sociality is best articulated through the figure of the film actor.[20] Benjamin describes how the film actor's performance is like a test in the sense that the film actor performs in front of the apparatus. There is a similarity between a film actor and an athlete, Benjamin notes, which is not simply that they are both performing a test—that is also the case for a worker operating a machine in a factory. Rather, the similarity between the film actor and the athlete consists in that their test performances "are capable of being publically exhibited" (Benjamin 2002, 111). But their difference is also telling: whereas the athlete "measures himself against tasks set by nature," the measure of the film actor's test is his performance in relation to the filming apparatuses: "Film makes test performances

capable of being exhibited, by turning that ability itself into a test" (Benjamin 2002, 111). The exhibition of the performance enables the film actor's participation in the community. The film actor then becomes paradigmatic of the modern subject in the sense that technological means at his disposal make possible the way that his actions relate to others—the way that he participates in the community. Technology signifies for Benjamin the being with of the subject.

The link between technology and the subject leads to the critique of the autonomous individual.[21] Benjamin carries out this critique through a comparison between the stage actor and the film actor. It starts with the following distinction: "The actor represents someone else before the audience . . . [whereas] he represents himself before the apparatus" (Benjamin 2002, 112). The test performance that takes place in the actor's relating to the apparatus is part of the singular experience that unfolds in the now. This recalls the insistence by Solon to participate in the agon that characterizes the polis. The theme of exile is also present in Benjamin, who cites Pirandello's observation that the "film actor feels . . . as if exiled." But if the Athenian citizen was exiled from the city for not participating, from where is the film actor exiled? The citation from Pirandello continues: "Exiled not from the stage but from his own person" (ibid.). The film actor is exiled from his own person in the sense of being exiled from that notion of the modern subject whose autonomy presupposes a consistent identity with clear spatiotemporal limits. The reason is that these limits are assailed by the apparatus that functions like a prosthesis to the being of the film actor. His being, acting, and participation unfold in intimate relation to these ancillary instruments. The film actor is Benjamin's figuration of the subject whose being is *with* others through the mediation of technological means.

It is at this point, after the assertion of the inherent sociality that technology grants the subject, that the dramatic choice between sovereign violence and stasis takes center stage. Benjamin imagines a film actor asked to feign surprise in front of the camera, but whose performance does not satisfy the director. In that case, Benjamin asserts, "The director can resort to an expedient: he could have a shot fired without warning behind the actor's back on some other occasion when he happened to be in the studio. The actor's frightened reaction at that moment could be recorded and then edited into the film" (Benjamin

2002, 113). The technical aspect of recording the actor's startled response recalls Jean-Luc Godard, who makes a virtue of challenging the actor in similar ways.[22] But the technical aspect is not an end in itself in Benjamin's essay. Rather, it is always linked to the way that technology provides the means for the subject to relate to others. Unlike the Athenian citizen in Solon's law who does not participate at all, here the film actor fails to participate in an adequate manner. His acting is wanting. The gun shot behind the back of the unsuspecting actor becomes a further instrument in assisting with participation. Instead of the actual threat of violence—the threat to kill the subject—the gun here is an ancillary that remedies the actor's deficient performance, thereby facilitating his participation with others.

Benjamin's figure of the film actor takes sides in the dramatic choice between sovereign violence and stasis of Act I. The film actor indicates a participation that leads to commonality. The shot fired is not aimed at killing the actor, but rather at enabling his participating. Benjamin emphasizes this engagement with others immediately after the "case" of the gun shot behind the back: "The representation of human beings by means of an apparatus has made possible a highly productive use of the human being's self-alienation. The nature of this use can be grasped through the fact that the film actor's estrangement in the face of the apparatus . . . is basically of the same kind as the estrangement felt before one's appearance in a mirror—a favorite theme of the Romantics" (Benjamin 2002, 113). In other words, to recall Pirandello, the actor is exiled from that notion of subjectivity that requires a distinct individual in space and time—just like the Kantian subject that was criticized by the Romantics. But Benjamin is not content with the Romantic solution that delighted in the mise en abyme of infinite reflection. Instead, technology facilitates participation with the others. Benjamin continues: "But now the mirror image has become detachable from the person mirrored, and is transportable. And where is it transported? To a site in front of the masses. . . . When he [the screen actor] stands in front of the apparatus, he knows that in the end he is confronting the masses. It is they who will control him" (ibid.). The shot has not killed a subject. Instead, the shot facilitates contact with others. The shot shows that the subject is not autonomous, but rather controlled by the other(s). The film actor's being is a being with.

ACT II: THE CUNNING OF WEAKNESS

The choice between violence and stasis in Act I seems to resolve itself in favor of stasis. And yet, there is a dramatic twist, according to which the thanatopolitics of violence emerges as victorious the moment it is thought to have been overcome. Sovereignty triumphs when stasis is presented as eliminating violence. To present the salient aspects of this twist, we can turn to Nietzsche, who describes it as a reversal in *On the Genealogy of Morality.* In the first essay of the *Genealogy of Morality,* Nietzsche outlines two forms of power in terms of the contrast between the nobleman and the slave. The slave exercises violence through renouncing power. This renunciation of power is commensurate with an asceticism that retreats from experience, which makes it analogous to the sense of violence described earlier. Conversely, the power of the nobleman insists on experience, singularity, and contestation, thereby resonating with stasis.[23] The slave prevails because, according to Nietzsche, weakness or powerlessness provides him with a cunning that the nobleman finds impossible to combat. Understood in these terms, the drama that unfolds in Act II concerns how to avoid *the cunning of weakness.* How is it possible to bypass the overcoming of violence, which only leads to its triumph through the coupling of violence and weakness?

Before tackling this question, it is necessary to grasp what is at stake. Nietzsche explicitly states that this is not an incidental relation, but rather the relation that has determined the history of the Occident: "The two *opposing* values [represented by the nobleman and the slave] have fought a terrible battle for thousands of years on earth . . . up to now there has been no greater event than this battle" (2006, 1. 16). The historical significance of this "battle" consists in showing how the clash between the cunning of weakness and the agonism of stasis is determinative of how power is exercised. For Nietzsche, the cunning of weakness is the assertion of constituted power—it is the assertion of sovereignty. In modernity, to hold power, to express the right of the strongest, or to be sovereign, consists in the exercise of the cunning of weakness. The dramatic tension of Act II is not simply about a hero, but rather about the clash between two different worldviews: if stasis, following Solon, is constitutive of agonistic democracy, the violence of the cunning of weakness stands for sovereignty. How, then, can stasis

respond to the cunning of weakness? But the question formulated this way is still too broad. We need to circumscribe it further.

Let us proceed, then, by delineating more clearly the cunning of weakness by returning to the two senses of the "after" in the question "What comes after the subject?" As extrapolated above, the first sense of the "after" posits an individual that exists in a temporal continuum. The problem with this sense of the "after" is that the "death" of the subject would also affect the others who are of necessity part of it. Such an exclusion exhibits a death drive. As opposed to it, the "after" as relational stresses the subject's participation as an affirmation of its singularity. Instead of exclusion, we find here an agonistic engagement with the other. The question about the relation between these "afters" poses a complex problem that can be expressed as follows: If we are to overcome the death drive expressed as the elimination of the subject, does not that reproduce the very structure of overcoming that the temporal sense of the "after" requires? If something is to come after the "after" understood in terms of temporal sequence, then the sense of the temporal continuum that is supposed to be overcome underwrites the structure of its overcoming—which entails that it survives in a different guise. Its weakness, signified by its overcoming, in fact signals its victory. More generally, signifying the temporal "after" as somehow inferior and expungeable, as something—a thought perhaps, or an illusion, even a concept—that can be killed off simply reproduces the logic of violence that it seeks to overcome. It signifies that the defeat of the subject, its death, is its supreme triumph. The possibility of a relational ontology that sides with stasis depends upon finding an adequate response to the cunning of weakness.

Jacques Derrida offers one way of unraveling this complex relation between the two senses of the "after." In "Ousia and Gramme," Derrida considers Heidegger's destruction of the "vulgar concept of time"—that is, the various determinations of time that presuppose a metaphysics of presence. Such a conception of time always relies on a sense of linearity and succession, such as in the first sense of the "after." A close reading of Heidegger's examples of such a "vulgar" concept of time leads Derrida to the conclusion that in fact "every text of metaphysics carries within itself . . . *both* the so-called 'vulgar' concept of time *and* the resources that will be borrowed from the system

of metaphysics in order to criticize that concept" (1982, 60). Thus, it is no longer a matter of overcoming such a "vulgar" concept or of conducting a destruction of metaphysics more generally. Rather, it is a matter of recognizing that "perhaps there is no 'vulgar concept of time'" (63). Derrida's strategy, then, consists not in rejecting the "vulgar concept of time," but rather in showing that the "vulgar concept of time" rejects itself, so to speak. Or, differently put, the "vulgar concept of time" is its own condition of self-countering. This implies that a transition to the relational sense of the "after" requires the recognition that the temporal "after" is already contained in it. It is not a matter of transcending one meaning in favor of another, or of overcoming one understanding in order to arrive at a second one. Rather, it is a matter of performing the necessary work that deconstructs the first sense of the "after"—after as temporal succession—thereby showing its dependence upon the second "after"—after as an ontologico-political relationality.[24]

We can translate Derrida's strategy in the dramatic scene of the relation between stasis and the cunning of weakness. Following Derrida's strategy, we do not need to exclude, reject, overcome, expunge, eliminate, delete, or annihilate the sovereign violence that accompanies the sense of the subject as an autonomous individual in the temporal continuum. Rather, we need to show how the subject in fact presupposes stasis and its productive relationality. Differently put, such a strategy avoids asking "What comes after . . . ?" as if a clear rupture is possible, insisting instead on what is presupposed in this question. In this sense, what matters is what comes "before"—what is the cause that effects the "after" that can be linked to a "vulgar concept of time" or to the death of the subject. The *being with* that characterizes the ontologico-political constitution of agonistic democracy emerges then as the cause of the cunning of weakness. The corollary of this is that violence and the cunning of weakness are by-products of stasis. The agonistic conception, according to which the subject is always in relation with others, effects the violence that articulates itself as a thirst for power.

This means that it is no longer, as in Act I, a matter of a subjective choice between two options. The moment that the subject is posed to choose, sovereignty has already prevailed, since the cunning of weakness translates this defeat into a triumph. Conversely, the strategy

according to which agonistic democracy can effect sovereignty does not rely on choice and a subjective decision but rather insists on the ineluctable necessity of the subject's being with. The drama in Act II, then, consists in how to account for this necessity. Or, differently put, the dramatic twist in Act II asks: How can stasis respond to the cunning of weakness in such a way that the response does not appear as a subjective choice but as necessary?

* * *

Walter Benjamin's film actor stars in the drama of Act II too.[25] The film actor in Benjamin's extrapolation demonstrates, as we saw, the being with characteristics of a politics of participation. The relational ontology of the film actor articulates through his use of technology as a means to facilitate participation. As we saw in the "paradoxical case" of the shot fired behind his back so that the camera can capture his reaction, his surprise makes the film actor confront the masses. Benjamin even says that it is the people "who will control" the actor, in the sense that the participation using technological means is not an expedient for the individual as an end in itself; rather, it is the means to create a community of participation where no single individual can hold power on its own. And yet, at this moment of the seeming victory of stasis, Benjamin sounds a stern warning. There can be "no political advantage derived," he says, from this control of the actor by the masses until film production itself is liberated from capitalist control. Differently put, certain political and economic powers can usurp film's potential to enhance participation and use it toward the opposite purpose, namely, to manipulate the population. Or, in Benjamin's words, "film capital uses the revolutionary opportunities implied by this control for counterrevolutionary purposes" (2002, 113). The dramatic tension between stasis and sovereignty emerges through the contrast between revolution and counterrevolution.[26]

Let us examine first the notion of the counterrevolution as it emerges in section XII of the "Work of Art" essay and its accompanying note. Benjamin describes counterrevolution as the "corruption by which fascism is seeking to supplant the class consciousness of the masses" (2002, 113). In a significant footnote to this observation, Benjamin contemplates the changes to parliamentary democracy precipitated by the advent of new technologies: "Radio and film are changing

not only the function of the professional actor but, equally, the function of those who, like the politician, present themselves before the media." Politicians communicate effectively through the media, thereby gradually supplanting the role of parliament. Benjamin continues: "The direction of this change is the same for the actor and for the politician, regardless of their different tasks. It tends towards the exhibition of controllable, transferable skills under certain social conditions" (128). The use of technology as a means does not have a predetermined outcome. It can be used by diverse interests and for contradictory purposes. The direction is the same in all cases in the sense that technology enhances control. It can be the control of the actor by the masses, thereby eliminating subjective autonomy and enhancing participation, as we saw earlier. But it can equally be the control of the people by those who have no interest whatsoever in enhancing political participation or instituting agonistic democracy. Benjamin is realistic about how the potential for control offered by technology articulates itself at the time of writing the essay, in 1936: "The champion, the star, and the dictator emerge as victors" (ibid.). Benjamin's notion of the counterrevolution, then, functions just like the cunning of weakness. As soon as subjective autonomy is defeated because film brings the actor into relation with the masses, that subjective autonomy is reinstated through the manipulation of individuals by "the champion, the star, and the dictator."

Earlier in the essay Benjamin provides the rudiments of a response to counterrevolution and the cunning of weakness. In section VI, he draws a distinction between a "first" and a "second" technology and, in a significant note to the same section, he uses that distinction in order to offer his own interpretation of revolution. Importantly, the discussion of the two technologies is introduced as being drawn from a "dialectical standpoint." Benjamin indicates two significant aspects of the distinction between the two technologies. First, "Whereas the [first technology] made the maximum possible use of human beings, the [second one] reduces their use to the minimum." The first technology is characterized by an opposition to the subject. The subject is here understood as separate from technology. The opposition between the first technology and the subject is so stark that Benjamin avers that the culmination of this technology is "human sacrifice." The human uses means at its disposal in order to end its life. Conversely, the second

technology reduces the use of the subject in the sense that technology becomes its prosthesis. As in the example discussed earlier, the camera is the means that allows the film actor to be transferred in front of the masses.

The second aspect of the distinction is this: "The first technology really sought to master nature, whereas the second aims rather at an interplay between nature and humanity" (Benjamin 2002, 107). The first technology leads to a dialectic of mastery, as, for instance, when the audience is manipulated by film: "In great ceremonial processions, giant rallies and mass sporting events, and in war, all of which are fed into the camera, the masses come face to face with themselves" (132). Benjamin is probably thinking here of the Nüremberg rallies and the Berlin Olympics—held in 1936, the year this version of the essay was written. The "masses come face to face with themselves" in the sense that technology forces them to create an identity, a "we." This identity is essentially the same as the identity of the individual in time and space, but now on a large scale. This identity is formed by technology in order to control the masses. Conversely, the second technology is an interplay. The word that Benjamin uses, *Zusammenspiel,* can also be rendered more freely as interrelation, as a playing with, or even a being with. The second technology establishes that relation between the subject and its environment. But this is no longer a relation of mastery but a joyous relation—one of play and cooperation. Technology, Benjamin points out, has a liberating potential when the human adapts to the use of means commensurate with the second technology (108).

At this juncture Benjamin inserts a note that provides a remarkably simple definition of revolution: "The aim of revolution is to accelerate this adaptation" (124). Given the above determination of the second technology, revolution for Benjamin indicates two things: first, the cooperation of the subject with the technological means at its disposal, and, second, the use of technology to participate with the other, to enable a being with others. The revolution points to a dialectic that evades mastery because the unfolding of the relations are unpredictable, immanent, and contestable. Revolution is the creation of that space of contestability. Thus, Benjamin's revolution appears as analogous to the agonism instituted by stasis.

At this point, the problem of the cunning of weakness returns: counterrevolution uses modern technological means, such as film, in

order to revert to the first technology that seeks to control the masses. Does Benjamin provide an account as to how the second technology can respond to the threat of the counterrevolution? Even though Benjamin does not formulate the problem in these terms, the example of the shot that surprises the actor suggests an answer. The reason is that the metaphysical tradition imbues surprise in a dialectic of mastery. The film actor's surprise responds by transferring control to the masses and thus transforming mastery into participation.

There are two well-known senses of surprise in the metaphysical tradition that lead to a dialectic of mastery.[27] First, there is the Platonic and Aristotelian insistence that surprise or *thaumazein* is the starting point of philosophizing. This move equates surprise with intellectual curiosity, or love of wisdom (*philo-sofia*). As Aristotle explains in the second chapter of the first book of *Metaphysics, thaumazein* refers to the perplexity experienced by the subject in the face of an object calling for explanation (1933, 982b–983a).[28] In this sense, surprise becomes a precondition of knowledge, the foundational mood for science or *episteme*. The culmination of this sense of surprise is Cartesian doubt. As in the famous anecdote from the *Mediations,* Descartes wonders at existence in the middle of the night, only to arrive at the conclusion that the cogito—the subject's capacity to know—underlies existence. In all these cases, we have a separation of the subject from its environment. The objects around the subject are not conceived as technological means, but rather as something alien. This is the first characteristic of the first technology, as extrapolated above.

The second way of understanding surprise in the metaphysical tradition corresponds to mastery, as the second characteristic of the first technology. Surprise here arises from what cannot be amenable to knowledge, a wonder in the sense of a miracle. Indeed, the substantive *thauma,* whose root is the verb *thaumazein*—the word used by Aristotle and Plato to signify "to wonder, to be surprised"—means "miracle" in New Testament Greek. The same ambiguity between surprise and miracle is still present in the German word "Wunder," leading Carl Schmitt to assert: "The exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology" (36).[29] The exceptional is not something that simply surprises the subject. Rather, it is a surprise that arises by the assertion of the supreme political power, the sovereign, and moreover it indicates the sovereign's standing above the law. Differently

put, the exception is analogous to the miracle because the former asserts the mastery of the "God on earth"—as Hobbes calls the sovereign—and the latter the mastery of God himself.

We can note a discrepancy between, on the one hand, established uses of surprise in the tradition, and, on the other, the use of surprise in the "strange case" of the film actor. Specifically, Benjamin utilizes the topos of surprise, which is linked to mastery, but for the opposite purpose, namely, to argue for the liberating potential of the second technology. This is significant because it suggests that there is no monopoly of a topos like surprise by a dialectic of mastery. Rather, a different dialectic can be conceived—one that does not resolve itself into mastery. Benjamin refers to this as a dialectic at a standstill. This dialectic signals Benjamin's strategy for evading the cunning of weakness.[30]

The first move to approach Benjamin's dialectic at a standstill from the perspective of surprise consists in highlighting his use of shock as a figure that shows a transition from *Erlebnis* to *Erfahrung*.[31] These are two senses of experience that point, respectively, to the first and the second technology. In section III of the Baudelaire essay, Benjamin argues that being conscious can either mean an experience (*Erlebnis*) under the control of external stimuli, which can lead to trauma because the subject is shocked or surprised—as was the case with World War I veterans; or being conscious means to register the surprises—or an experience (*Erfahrung*) "for which the exposure to shock has become the norm" (Benjamin 2003, 318). In *Erlebnis,* the subject is opposed to its environment, whereas in *Erfahrung* the environment provides the subjects with the means of experience. Everything that does not comprise the subject is, according to *Erlebnis,* destructive of the subject. In the case of *Erfahrung,* on the contrary, the environment retains the potential to be of use to the subject, even when it is full of surprises and shocks. This has a clear political import for Benjamin, who indicates that the most important element of *Erfahrung* is "the close connection . . . between the figure of shock and the urban masses" (320). Sociality, then, the being with others, can even take place as an involuntary reaction to shock, so long as that forms a kind of experience that corresponds to the second technology.

According to Benjamin, this experience of shock or surprise can also be intentional. Benjamin signals out here Brecht's epic theater that eliminates any vestige of catharsis.[32] In other words, epic theater does

not provide an emotional release for the subject in the guise of a resolution to a dialectic. The reason is that any such resolution or release will introduce the cunning of weakness. Instead, Benjamin focuses on Brecht's technique of freezing the drama on the stage as an unexpected, surprising, even shocking moment for the audience that contains a didactic potential. There is a stasis on the stage, a surprising standstill of the action. In the first version of "What Is Epic Theatre?," Benjamin coins the term "dialectic in a standstill" in describing this surprise in Brechtian theater, which he elaborates in the second version as the "discovery (or defamiliarization) of situations . . . fostered through interruption of the action" (2003, 304). Film goes a step further, according to the "Work of Art" essay: "Film has freed the physical shock effect" (2002, 119). With film, it is not simply a matter of the director or the playwright probing the audience to participate. Rather, with film the masses can also take control, as Benjamin points out earlier, in section XII. Surprise, shock, and their cognates describe a trajectory of the second technology that leads progressively to an intensification of participation: from participation that is enabled at the personal level through *Erfahrung*, to the communal level in the theater, to a participation through film that can potentially comprise everyone since a film's audience is potentially limitless. Surprise then figures in the second technology.

By thus subverting a topos traditionally linked to the first technology, Benjamin's dialectic at a standstill shifts the terms in such a way as to avoid the central premise of the cunning of weakness, namely, that either one position or the other will have to prevail—either being with or the death of the subject, either agonistic democracy or sovereignty, either stasis or violence, either revolution or counterrevolution. Surprise shows that this either/or can be inclusive in the sense that surprise describes an experience whose basis is participation and being with. Surprise is ultimately not a matter of choice but a necessary reaction. Benjamin's subversion of the topos of surprise suggests that what causes the surprise that separates the subject from its environment and leads to sovereignty is in fact a different notion of surprise, one that points to participation and being with. Surprise as first technology presupposes surprise as second technology. At the same time, given the presence of a counterrevolutionary notion of surprise, which has historically been mobilized to animate the cunning

of weakness, the notion of surprise as stasis needs to be worked out. The film actor's surprise does that work for Benjamin. The strategy of surprise in the "strange case" of the film actor agrees with the Derridean strategy described earlier. Echoing Derrida, we could say that there is really no surprise that is individualistic and anchored in a dialectic of mastery—because the dialectic of mastery presupposes stasis.

* * *

There is an enactment of this strategy we encounter in Derrida and Benjamin that is directly linked to Solon's law of stasis. It emerges in an anecdote Plutarch relates about Solon. Even though the episode is placed in a time prior to Solon's laws, and despite its almost apocryphal nature, it still captures the essential elements of the strategy that relates stasis and violence in such a way as to avoid the cunning of weakness and a dialectic of mastery, and it does so by showing that stasis is the actual cause of sovereignty.

The polis of Athens and the polis of Megara are in a prolonged conflict for the control of the island of Salamis. The Athenians, fed up by the lack of resolution, pass "a law that no one in future, on pain of death, should move, in writing or orally, that the city take up its contention for Salamis." This is the diametrical opposite from the law of stasis—the law according to which whoever does not participate in conflicts of the city is to be disenfranchised and expelled from the city. According to the Solonian law, stasis produces participation and hence it is absolutely indispensable for the operation of agonistic democracy. Democracy does not exist without stasis. Conversely, the law that prohibited even raising the issue of Salamis "on pain of death" is designed to preempt the possibility of stasis. In this, it also excludes the possibility of participation. It functions instead as a sovereign ban, as the sovereign prerogative of life and death indicated by the punishment to execute anyone who raises the issue of Salamis. The contrast between the prohibition to raise the issue of Salamis and the Solonian law about stasis is so sharp that it would not be inconceivable that Solon writes the later law precisely as a response to the law about Salamis prohibiting stasis. Despite the lack of textual or historical evidence to support a direct connection between the two laws, Plutarch reports the profound influence that the law about Salamis has had on Solon: "Solon could not endure the disgrace of this [the law about Salamis]"

(Plutarch, VIII.1). It is not inconceivable that Solon's sense of "disgrace" prompted him later to conceive of the law of stasis.

But the implications of this sense of "disgrace" reach much further than being a possible prompt for the law of stasis. More important, the sense of disgrace foregrounds the contrast between two political dispositions. One, espoused by Solon, is agonistic—and this means an ideal that engages in the here and now asserting the power of participation. A sense of disgrace can be a motivating factor for the citizen to engage in stasis. The other, on the contrary, is the ideal of the perpetuation of Athenian power that asserts itself as the weakness to conduct a war for Salamis and as capital punishment for any member of the polis who internally challenges this sovereign assertion of weakness. Dissimulating the support for an ideal of peace, the law prohibiting debate on the Salamis issues in fact an assertion of sovereign violence—indicated by "on the pain of death." It asserts violence by rescinding power—that is, it mobilizes the cunning of weakness. Thus, Solon's response to this law—a response that I will describe in a moment—can be understood not merely as a synecdoche of the law of stasis. Moreover, it is an assertion of the primacy of stasis over sovereignty.

So how does the disgrace of the elimination of stasis provoke Solon to respond? The first step of Solon's strategy is to spread a rumor in the polis that he is losing his mind, that he is showing "signs of madness" (Plutarch, VIII.2). The wording is significant, since Plutarch uses the word "ekstasis" to signify "madness." The main meaning of ekstasis is associated with poetic frenzy, the madness of inspiration—we will see shortly how poetry plays a role in this story about Solon, which affirms this meaning of ekstasis.[33] But there is, in addition, a play with the etymology in such a way as to inscribe Solon's ekstasis into a political realm. We have the word "stasis" with the prefix "ek." The prefix signifies an extension—a movement away, a thrusting out. It is as if Solon is losing his mind because the Salamis law thrusts him out of stasis. He is exiled from stasis—he is ek-static. The opposite of stasis is victorious—which, for Solon, is madness. But this leap away from stasis is also a return to stasis. Or, rather, stasis is the presupposition of this ekstasis. The reason is that the ekstasis enables a strategy to reinstate stasis in the polis. Having spread the rumor to protect himself from prosecution, Solon composes satiric poems about the law and recites them in the agora. The poetic and subjective—

ontologico-political—meanings of ekstasis merge in this act: the poetic frenzy is an affirmation of the primacy of stasis. Solon's intervention is decisive. The overwhelmingly positive response of the polis leads to the revoking of the Salamis law.[34]

Solon did not confront the Salamis law head on. He did not seek a revolution that would overthrow the law. In fact, a revolution whose aim is the overthrow of constituted power is in danger of playing into the hands of the cunning of weakness. The reason is that the substitution of one sovereign by another is still a perpetuation of sovereign violence. Solon is well aware of the cunning of weakness. His ekstasis, then, is not simply a tactic to undermine the law. Instead, his ekstasis enacts that which the law prohibits—namely, stasis and the sense of participation and agonistic democracy that follow from it. And yet this enactment does not, strictly speaking, break the law of Salamis; since the enactment is ekstatic, it is a madness that is performed in a poetic frenzy. This requires Solon to actively work, to engage and participate by grasping the singularity of the moment. This is a strategy that both responds to the situation at hand and at the same time shows a response evading the cunning of weakness because it shows that agonism and stasis are contained within sovereignty. Solon's strategy, then, echoes the Derridean strategy as well as the Benjaminian dialectic at a standstill, which I discussed earlier.

Following Solon, we can call the strategy that evades the cunning of weakness the ekstatic strategy. The ekstatic strategy presents a scene in which the subject still plays a crucial role. It is a role that affirms singularity, participation, engagement, and the work required to evade the cunning of weakness. At the same time, the ekstatic strategy is not the prerogative of any one subject in particular. This is a strategy that arises from an ontologico-political level that cannot be appropriated by any one subject. Rather, it is the ontologico-political that frames subjective actions. From this perspective, the drama enacted in this scene is not about one subject, such as Solon. Rather, it is about the relation between two ways of relating. One way is a relation that seeks to eliminate participation using the cunning of weakness. According to agonism, the second way of relating, participation is inscribed in all political scenes, even when participation seems to have been ruled out by law or by rote. This suggests that stasis is the necessity that determines the actions of the subject. There is no subject without

the imperative to engage agonistically with the other. The ekstatic strategy determines that the cunning of weakness cannot prevail because it presupposes—it is the after-effect of—stasis.

There are three important points that can be drawn in conclusion. First, the dramatic scene about the relation between stasis and sovereignty resonates with contemporary thinking of democracy and the political. The fact that the ekstatic strategy can be discovered from the time of the Athenian polis up to current conceptions of the political and the subject indicates a thread that still connects modernity with agonistic democracy. The radical democratic act today is to follow that thread of stasis and agonism. The corollary of this is that the ekstatic strategy shows that the primacy of stasis—the fact that sovereign violence is an effect of stasis—is not peculiar to particular institutions or to particular historical configurations. Rather, the ekstatic strategy is the mechanism that shows that democracy is the cause of the sovereignty.

Second, the expression of the ekstatic strategy in scenes of stasis is always singular. Even though stasis is not confined to particular institutional or historical configurations, still its enactment is always a response to singular circumstances and it is always a singular response. Solon's actions, for instance, are specifically adapted to the singular circumstances that he finds himself in when he is confronted with the cunning of weakness in the guise of the law about Salamis. Solon's response is unique—it is singular and unrepeatable. The corollary to this is that the singularity of the response always runs manifold risks. The risk can arise either from the way that the response will be received by the other, or by the always present possibility of the insufficiency of the response. For instance, Solon has to take the risk that either the Athenians will react negatively to his ekstasis, or that his sense of disgrace in the face of the Salamis law fails to grasp the situation adequately. The singularity of the enactment of stasis is inevitably pregnant with risk.

Third, the agonistic sense of democracy has to embrace both the ekstatic strategy as a way of responding to the cunning of weakness and the singularity of each response. This means that, on the one hand, stasis inscribes agonism as the opposition to the cunning of weakness and the kind of politics that follow from it. And on the other hand, it also means that every articulation of the ekstatic strategy has

no guarantee that it will live up to the agonistic principle. The strategy cannot always be successful. Ekstasis can also fail to live up to stasis. Maybe here we encounter the closest we can come to a definition of agonistic democracy: the continuous approximation and distancing between the strategy employed to articulate stasis and the presentation of stasis in the way that subjects relate to each other. Given that this is not a definition in the sense that it gives a consistent description of this struggle, maybe it is better to understand it as the drama or the dramatic scene of the political: the subject's unstable, risky, and incessant effort to participate in stasis.

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Notes

1. Étienne Balibar, "Citizen Subject," trans. James B. Swenson Jr., in *Who Comes After the Subject?,* ed. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy, 33–57. Balibar has recently tried to review and renew the argument of this paper in "Can We Say: After the Subject Comes the Stranger?," talk for the Conference "Thinking with Balibar," Columbia University, Maison Française, November 13–14, 2014. I thank Étienne Balibar for making a copy of his address available to me.

2. The same law is also reported elsewhere, for instance, by Plutarch in *Solon,* in *Lives*, vol. 1, XX.1. For a review of the various sources of the law, as well as the reasons why I prefer to call it the "law of stasis" as opposed to the "law of neutrality," see chap. 1 of Vardoulakis, *Violence and Democracy*.

3. Cf. Elton T. E. Baker, *Entering the Agon.*

4. See, in particular, *Stasis Before the State* and *Violence and Democracy,* where I outline a series of implications that follow the principle of the priority of *kratos* over *demos* in the understanding of agonistic democracy.

5. See Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War;* and Plutarch, *Solon,* XXIV.2.

6. The discourse of exceptionalism is much later and it has a specific historical grounding, namely, the political genesis of the United States. An important figure for this discourse is Alexis de Tocqueville's book on America from the early nineteenth century, *Democracy in America.* For a more recent, important contribution, see Michael Walzer's *What Does It Mean to Be an "American"?*

7. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit.*

8. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time.*

9. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Toward an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays.*

10. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition.*

11. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life.*

12. Gerhard Richter has written a compelling conceptual analysis of the "after." See Richter, *Afterness: Figures of Following in Modern Thought and Aesthetics.* See also Peter Krapp, *Déjà vu: Aberrations of Cultural Memory*.

13. As Chris Peterson points out in "The Posthumanism to Come," this disavowal of the subject can also characterize discourse such as posthumanism and animal studies.

14. As Jean-Luc Nancy warns, this does not entail a "liquidation" of the subject. Nancy notes in the Introduction the following double movement: "There is nothing nihilistic in recognizing that the subject—the property of the self—is the thought that reabsorbs or exhausts all possibility of being in the world (all possibility of existence, all existence as being delivered to the possible)." This identifies the subject within a particular ontological matrix of metaphysics, according to which the subject is defined by being referred to something over and above itself. But Nancy also immediately adds: "and that this same thought, never simple, never closed upon itself without remainder, designates and delivers an entirely different thought: that of the *one* and that of the some *one*, of the singular existent that the subject announces, promises, and at the same time conceals." In other words, the conception that denies to the subject is at the same time implicated, of necessity and even despite itself, in not only promising and even presupposing that existence. Jean-Luc Nancy, Introduction, in Cadava et al., *Who Comes After the Subject?*, 4.

15. I analyze the justification of violence as the definition of sovereignty in *Sovereignty and Its Other.*

16. I have developed aspects of such a relational ontology of the subject as a doppelgänger elsewhere. See Dimitris Vardoulakis, *The Doppelgänger: Literature's Philosophy,* in which I approach the question of the subject in the wake of the Kantian separation between subject and subjectivity.

17. Bonnie Honig has described a similarly constructed ambivalence around the figure of the foreigner as central to democracy in *Democracy and the Foreigner.* And Amanda Third shows that a similar ambivalence around the figure of the female terrorist is determinative both of feminism and radical politics in *Gendering the Political: Deconstructing the Female Terrorist*.

18. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents,* chap. 5.

19. For a reading of the political in Walter Benjamin's work, see Andrew Benjamin, *Working with Walter Benjamin: Recovering a Political Philosophy.* Howard Caygill's *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* remains the best account of Benjamin's conception of experience through his writings on art.

20. For the most important contribution to Benjamin's importance for film theory, see Miriam Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno.*

21. Technology as one prosthesis of the subject and the dismantling of subjective autonomy implicate each other, as Carry Wolfe argues in *What Is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008). This is further articulated in terms of a political ontology that is attuned to being with, to "the *necessity* of the other" (Wolfe, 122).

22. Godard says: "I like to sneak up on an actor from behind, leaving him to fend for himself, following his groping movements in the part, trying to seize on the sudden, unexpected, good moment which crops up spontaneously" (7). Godard is here describing how neither uses improvisation nor a set script, extracting instead a performance from the actor on the set.

23. For the agonistic in Nietzsche, see Christa Davis Acampora, *Contesting Nietzsche* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013).

24. I cannot deviate here into an excursus on Nietzsche, but I want to note that the same strategy can be noted in his work. For instance, in *On the Genealogy of Morality,* this strategy is particularly prominent in the third essay. Nietzsche contrasts throughout the *Genealogy* two moralities, one that is an affirmation of life and of the will to power, and another that is reactive and negative. One way in which the latter manifests itself is the ascetic ideal, which, as Nietzsche argues in the third essay, is best encapsulated by the priest. There is, however, a turn in Nietzsche's argument, whereby he argues that the negation of life is nothing but a distorted or corrupted expression of the will to power: "this ascetic priest, this apparent enemy of life, this *negating one,*—he actually belongs to the really great *conserving* and *yes-creating* forces of life" (3.13). Understood as a strategy to counter the cunning of weakness, Nietzsche makes a point that is similar to Derrida's. They both deny that there is an inauthentic temporality or a will to nothingness that deny singularity and the being with of humans. Rather, the vulgar conception of time and nihilism presupposes that singularity and hence they are not separated from it. This raises the question of relation. What is the relation between those modalities that deny singularity and affirm violence and the agonistic modalities that are life affirming?

25. The dramatic tension in "Act II" between a conception of power as sovereignty and a conception of power as agonistic democracy can be translated in the contrast between fascism and communism that structures the political aspect of Benjamin's "Work of Art" essay. For an illuminating discussion about the relation between fascism and communism, see Peter Fenves, "Is There an Answer to the Aestheticizing of the Political?," in *Walter Benjamin and Art,* 60–72.

26. The usual way of understanding the revolution in Walter Benjamin is in terms of messianic interruption. See, for instance, Michael Löwy, *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's "On the Concept of History."* My comments on the revolution that concentrate here on a note in the "Work of Art" essay do not intend to contradict that view, as the later discussion of the notion of standstill in Benjamin suggests. They do intend, instead, to show the intimate link between the notion of technology as a means or medium of experience and the revolution.

27. I should note that Genevieve Lloyd proposes a thoroughly different genealogy of surprise in *Reclaiming Wonder* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017)—one that I was not aware of when I wrote the present article.

28. See also Plato, Theaetetus, in *Theaetetus and Sophist,* 155d.s.

29. Sigrid Weigel shows that Benjamin reconfigures the notion of amazement in order to critique Schmitt. See Weigel, *Body- and Image-Space: Re-reading Walter Benjamin,* 159–60.

30. I do not have the space here to go into any detail in the issue of a dialectic at standstill in Benjamin. I will only point out Samuel Weber's observation that the notion of the medium in Walter Benjamin—which in its generality covers all sorts of linguistic phenomena, including technological use—is linked to the notion of the dialectical image. See Weber, *Benjamin's–abilities.*

31. For an interesting discussion of the distinction between *Erlebnis* and *Erdahrung*, see Tim Beasley-Murray, *Mikhail Bakhtin and Walter Benjamin: Experience and Form,* 52–56.

32. On Benjamin's relation to Brecht, see Erdmut Wizisla, *Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht: The Story of a Friendship.*

33. For an account of the ancient Greek uses of ekstasis, see Michael A. Rinella, *Pharmakon: Plato, Drug Culture, and Identity in Ancient Athens,* 36–40.

34. This is probably the best-known historical anecdote about Solon's poems, and as such its actual historical veracity is contestable. For a reading of Solon's poem about Salamis, its contextualization in archaic poetry, and for a thorough bibliography, see Elizabeth Irwin, "The Transgressive Elegy of Solon?," in *Solon of Athens: New Historical and Philological Approaches,* ed. Josine H. Blok and André P. M. H. Lardinois, 36–78, especially 40–44.

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