

## ETHICS IN EMPIRE: THE ETHICAL RHETORIC OF 9/11

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THE ETHICAL RHETORIC OF 9/11

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This dissertation interrogates the ways in which the ethical rhetoric following September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 (particularly that of the administration of U.S. President George Bush) and contemporary globalization (which Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have called “Empire”) implicate one other, as well as the ways in which these interlinked discourses are currently shaping the post-9/11 global “ethical climate” and its universalized human subject. Drawing upon Jacques Derrida’s concept of “hauntology” which he introduces in *Specters of Marx* (1994), the main argument of the thesis is that the dominant post-9/11 ethical rhetoric is a *specter of Empire*, such that it is both a symptom of and a particularly influential force-of-law shaping the “Spirit” of contemporary globalization/Empire. The thesis claims that in their shared universalism, neo-Hegelian remainders of idealism, and theocratic impulses to contain and ethico-politically manage the entire world, globalization/Empire and its most serious recent symptoms—Bush’s post-9/11 ethical rhetoric and the global war on terror—contain suicidal auto-deconstructive tendencies that threaten to destroy themselves from within in spite of their utopic visions of themselves. Finally, the dissertation investigates some of the key spectral remainders of “9/11” and contemporary ethical thought which contradict and/or corroborate the dominant post-9/11 discourse of Empire and its universalized ethico-political human subject.



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## Introduction

In an instant and without warning on a fine fall morning, the known world had been jerked aside like a mere slide in a projector, and a new world had been rammed into its place....Has the eye of the world ever shifted more abruptly or completely than it did on September 11?

- Jonathan Schell *The Nation* October 15, 2001

What can possibly be meant by 9/11? Jacques Derrida, in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, says that if there is one thing we know for certain, it is that we do not know what is meant by 9/11—meaning that the implications, complexities and “event-ness” of this event can never be reduced to a knowable “truth” or circumscribed by a “name/date.” What are the ethical implications of this “nonhorizon of knowledge” (94)? Can such an “event”—or its spectral effects—be solely responsible for a *global* ethical sea-change? Mary Dudziak, in *September 11 in History: A Watershed Moment?* questions whether “the assumption that September 11 ‘changed everything’ [holds] up under closer scrutiny” (3). Moreover, she wonders what ethical limits and presuppositions are quietly galvanized and quickly globalized through such a universalization of 9/11 as *the* new watershed historical epoch? If Dudziak’s suspicions are correct—that 9/11 didn’t change the world *per se* but is part of a much more complex set of power relations and interrelated histories than first appears—is this “event” perhaps more productively probed as a *symptom* of what has long been unfolding under the name “globalization?” And likewise, a symptom of the fact that “globalization” is neither global nor working?

Arguably, the most dominant contemporary context making 9/11 intelligible is laid out by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their conceptualization of late-globalization as Empire. 9/11—whatever this “event” can possibly signify—is incomprehensible outside the complex network infrastructures, teletechnologies, and interrelated ethico-politico-ideological contexts of globalization/Empire. In contradiction with the post-Cold War triumphalism of neoconservatives such as Francis Fukuyama who hailed a particular specter of globalization as the utopic “end of history,” the tensions and contradictions within globalization threaten to eat it away from within like a ravaging autoimmune disorder.<sup>1</sup>

With this post-HIV tropology of dis-ease—9/11 being the symptom of a globalization now sick and getting worse—I am referring to Jacques Derrida’s comments about 9/11 in Giovanna Borradori’s *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*. David Simpson in *9/11: The Culture of Memorialization* unpacks Derrida’s concept of autoimmunity, pointing out that

Derrida [...] spoke bluntly [in Borradori’s book], but with a bluntness that is complex, of 9/11 as the symptom of a crisis in the autoimmune system of the West, specifically of a ‘suicidal autoimmunity’ whereby America has itself trained and subsidized the forces that have turned against it. The hijackers thereby incorporate ‘two suicides in one: their own (and one will remain forever defenseless in the face of a suicidal, autoimmunitary aggression—and that is what terrorizes most) but also the suicide of those who welcomed, armed and trained them.’ This is, importantly, not new: ‘one could endlessly multiply examples of these suicidal paradoxes.’ Not only are the events of Abu Ghraib the events of American prisons, but bin Laden wealth is/was deeply implicated in the U.S. economy, Osama

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<sup>1</sup> See Jacques Derrida, “Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides” in Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003), 85-136.

himself was a former ally in the war against the USSR in Afghanistan, Saddam himself was an ally whom America supported in his war against Iran (and who in 1988 gassed some of his own citizens, the Kurds—one of the crimes produced against him in 2003—with weapons financed by American support). Every imagining of the other is an encounter with the self: *they are us*. The phantasm of international terror—everywhere and always, unseen and ready to strike—is the reflection of global capitalism[.] (135-6)

Unpacking Derrida's argument, Simpson carefully inspects the key elements and players connected with the events of 9/11 and finds that the terrorized self and terrorist other fold into one another in a kind of *mise en abyme* in which "preventative war" *perpetuates* terrorism from within, and terrorism is likewise the alter-ego of a ubiquitous, cancerous capitalism spreading out of control. In other words, the very autoimmune defenses that American capitalist-driven globalization erects to protect itself ends up *creating* that very terror that it meant to defend itself against in the first place. *They are us*, says Simpson—a complex schema that refuses a reductive identification with the other as knowable "evil." Yet, this same schema implicates the globalized western military-industrial complex and its economic teletechnological infrastructures in the *creation* of "terrorist subjects" who, in fact, uncomfortably resemble the *state terrorism* so long carried out—in particular by the United States—to fight communism and for promoting modernization projects, democratization and capitalist structural adjustment programs. Simpson points out that "[Derrida] found in political systems a tendency to create immune and autoimmune components *at the same time*: no immunity without immunity to immunity" (136). The cure, in other

words, is always implicated with the disease, as well as with a breaking down of defenses against subsequent diseases.

Simpson clearly identifies the culprit he sees responsible for 9/11 in his warning that “the more power accruing to a state, the more powerful its autoimmune tendencies become: the exemplary state, the image and agent of the crisis in globalization, was and is the United States” (136). Hardt and Negri, while they would sympathize with Simpson’s critique, would disagree with him about who is to blame for 9/11. If 9/11 is a symptom of Empire, then Hardt and Negri would argue that no single actor or nation is solely responsible for it.

But if *they*—the terrorists—are *us*—meaning western capitalist globalization/Empire—then who exactly are “we?” And what are the stakes of identifying the “proper” subject of Empire?

The urgent task of better understanding the contours and contradictions of the “post-9/11 global citizen” whose rights and freedoms the war on terror was meant to protect involves grasping more clearly *by whom, for whom and in whose interests* such a subject is normativized. This subject, as referred to in the post-9/11 ethical discourse of President George W. Bush, is a disproportionately western-centric, neoconservative, neo-Hegelian, evangelical Christian subject of Empire who is most at home in the virtual hyper-reality of global media.<sup>2</sup> Further, legislation such as the U.S. Patriot Act implies that “patriotic” citizens must surrender certain rights and freedoms for the greater public “good.” Good

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<sup>2</sup> My chapter arrangement mirrors this description of the post-9/11 ethical subject of Empire.

for and by whom, however, are key questions left unanswered—or are rather *assumed*—by the Patriot Act. Such a nationally sanctioned exchange of rights—even lives—for “security” is being mimicked throughout the globe, as with Canada’s anti-terrorism act and Security Certificate.<sup>3</sup>

Hardt and Negri point out that the post-9/11 context of “total war” in Empire produces a universalized, imperially ordered biopolitical form of “life.” By this, they mean that *the* privileged form of life itself is now produced and normativized by Empire. This is a life that everyone in the world must conform to, argue Hardt and Negri, because of the totalizing reach of Empire as the hegemonic global paradigm. The neoconservative vision of the current Bush administration basically resembles the orthodoxy of capitalist globalization. As such, Empire—or, the “greater good” of globalization—lends President Bush’s world-reaching sovereign exceptionalism a globalized force-of-law in and through which his will over what counts as viable, livable life itself is being en/forced. Thus, while the Bush administration doesn’t solely own and operate Empire, at the moment, it seems to work *for* them and apparently operates *in their interests*.

This dissertation unpacks some of the ways in which Empire, the ethical rhetoric of the Bush administration, and 9/11 are linked. It will approach this question from several different angles. First, it interrogates some of the ways in which George W. Bush’s ethical rhetoric of 9/11 and its aftermath might be read

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<sup>3</sup> The Security Certificate is part of Canadian immigration law and authorizes “the power to detain someone without charge or bail, on the basis of secret ‘evidence’ which neither they nor their lawyer is allowed to see” (“What’s Wrong with Security Certificates” 2).

as symptoms of the contemporary discourse of globalization/Empire. Second, it demonstrates how this ethical rhetoric and the Global War on Terror it is designed to authorize have become the most dominant forces currently shaping the world's "ethical climate" and humanity itself. Finally, it will investigate some of the ethical remainders that either contradict or corroborate the dominant post-9/11 discourse of Empire and its universalized human subject.

The first chapter takes up Jacques Derrida's hauntological critique of post-Cold War globalization in *Specters of Marx* and interrogates the ways in which this book is an important specter haunting both Bush's post-9/11 ethical rhetoric and Hardt and Negri's conceptualization of Empire. Rethinking the shift which occurred after the fall of the Berlin wall from cold-war globalization to its post-9/11 period of Empire in *hauntological* terms throws into question the sublimation of these historical "events," revealing them to be neither uniquely world-changing nor bookmarking the "end of history." As a symptom of globalization, 9/11 is haunted by its historical complexities, contradictions and dis/continuities and is also implicated in Derrida's critique that refuses globalization's supposed universality as a "world order." This chapter takes up Derrida's concept of hauntology as a methodological strategy for approaching the post-9/11 ethical remainders haunting Empire and its key terms—an approach that I stay with throughout the thesis. I then take up Derrida's quasi-utopic concept of "new Internationalism" and its singular "non-citizen" as irrepressible specters haunting both Hardt and Negri's project and President Bush's post-9/11 ethical



rhetoric. “Fleshing out” the non-citizen of Derrida’s new Internationalism, I argue, offers a key ethico-political approach to unpacking the contours and contradictions of the normative post-9/11 subject of Empire.

The second chapter focuses on how Hardt and Negri’s project and its utopic ethico-political subject of the multitude are haunted, not only by Derrida, but by a number of key specters of ethics, such as Nietzschean “plastic-power,” Judith Butler’s concept of performativity, and Jean Luc Nancy’s and Giorgio Agamben’s concepts of “singularity.” These spectral remainders of ethics in Empire, I argue, refuse contemporary claims to ethical “universality” such as President Bush’s. They also serve to complicate and complexify Hardt and Negri’s conceptualization of globalization as Empire, as irreducible remainders of ethics working in, through, and against each other in their project.

The third chapter interrogates the Hegelian remainders in Bush’s and Hardt and Negri’s ethico-political rhetoric. Taking Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* the *Philosophy of History* and *The Philosophy of Right* as my primary texts, I read these alongside Bush’s speeches and Hardt and Negri’s *Empire* and *Multitude*. My critique takes up what I see as the spectral remainders of Hegel in the very terms and concepts of post-9/11 ethical discourse, to wit: freedom, love, family, the state, moral terror, and Hegel’s “great man” theory of World History. Reading Bush’s post-9/11 ethical rhetoric through its Hegelian remainders as a symptom of contemporary globalization/Empire, I argue, more clearly underlines the finitude and fallibilities of both Hegel’s and Bush’s ideas of freedom as a

result of Hegel's meticulously self-reflexive, proto-theoretical approach to universality—arguably the best worked-out early model of globalization.

My fourth and last chapter interrogates the ways in which the dominant subject of post-9/11 globalization has been uniquely “created” and ethico-politically framed in film, media and “new media.” The globalized, “virtual” space of the media in Empire is arguably a privileged habitus of post-9/11 biopolitical “life,” particularly of those normativized forms of humanity constructed in President Bush's ethical rhetoric. This chapter approaches these irreducibly complex fields by focusing on a single example which utilizes elements from an array of different mediums such as documentary film, Hollywood movie genres, global media and communications, and the internet: Paul Greengrass's *United 93*. The ways in which this film ethically “frames” itself—via mediatic and generic techniques such as the Hollywood disaster genre—as a supposedly reflective, sacred supplement offering up the truth about this tragic event in the unfolding of 9/11, however, I understand to be haunted and ultimately refused by a very different specter of “the disaster”: Maurice Blanchot's *The Writing of the Disaster*.

## Chapter 1

### Post-9/11 Empire and the Specters of New Internationalism

The multitude [of Empire] is composed of a set of *singularities* – and by singularities here we mean a social subject whose difference cannot be reduced to sameness, a difference that remains different.

- Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri *Multitude* page 99.

Barely deserving the name community, the new International belongs only to anonymity.

- Jacques Derrida *Specters of Marx* page 90.

I argue in this chapter that an irrepressible remainder haunting Hardt and Negri's concept of Empire and one of its most insidious recent symptoms, President Bush's post-9/11 ethical rhetoric, is Jacques Derrida's hauntological interrogation of post-cold-war globalization in *Specters of Marx*. Derridian "deconstruction" (if such a thing exists per se) has been closely associated with those sets of questions and modes of inquiry that many dismiss as "theory's" Empire of abstraction.<sup>4</sup> Others demonize a certain straw-man "Theory," accusing it of an academicist "terrorism" that is not unquestioningly for, and thus unquestionably against the forces of "good."<sup>5</sup> Marc Redfield suggests that, in

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the recent book *Theory's Empire*, ed. Daphne Patai and Wilfrido Corral (Columbia UP, 2005), which is comprised of a range of critical engagements with this question of "Theory" and "its" supposed imperialistic tendencies. Instructively, this turn away—by some—from "Theory" is occurring alongside what has been called the recent (re-)turn to "Ethics," a trend to which a number of conferences and books have been devoted.

<sup>5</sup> Especially during the first year or two after the September 11 attacks, the moral climate conveyed by major media sources like the *New York Times*, CNN, and especially Fox News, was such that critical assessments seen either as too forgiving of "terrorists" or too critical of the U.S.'s militaristic response and rhetoric were often shouted down. An extreme example of this was Bill

fact, the “war on terror” also constitutes a war on “theory” and informed debate that has a long history that dates back to the emergence of the concept of “terrorism” itself with the French revolution. In his essay “War on Terror,” Redfield proposes that

counterintuitive though it may seem, a meditation on the war on terror ultimately entangles us in the seemingly academic and culturally marginal question of ‘theory,’ and of a certain war on theory—a war waged in the name of certainty, clarity, referential stability—that forms part of the history and constitution of theory itself. (10)

Redfield’s subtle suggestion here is that the specter of theory haunts the war on terror as that irrepressible remainder which it must relentlessly repress in order to *appear* certain, clear-headed and referentially stable. The war on terror’s concomitant war on theory can be understood as a symptom of what Derrida calls the suicidal autoimmune disorder associated with western globalization, such that the war—fought *in the name of* certainty, clarity and referential stability—ends up attacking the very “theoretical” conditions of possibility for pursuing those ideals and, moreover, ends up immunizing the organism of western globalization—especially its foremost ambassador the United States—*against* immunity from attack along these same lines in the future. This suicidal immunity from immunity is apparent, for example, in the diminished world opinion, credibility and “moral authority” of the U.S. government who—in the name of democracy,

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O’Reilly’s infamous February 4th, 2003 on-air dressing-down of Jeremy Glick, whose father died in the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks. This was because Jeremy, an activist and writer, remained critically engaged with the wider, more complex role the U.S. government played in promoting and funding global terrorists responsible for the attacks. For clips of the interview, as well as of further misleading and blatantly false remarks O’Reilly makes about Glick on subsequent shows,

freedom, and fighting “terror”—have flouted major human rights conventions, allowed capitalist greed connected to the highest echelons of the U.S. government to profiteer on humanitarian disaster, to ignore the sovereignty of most other nations, and either to blatantly lie or to be incredibly inept when it came to assessing “intelligence” regarding weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

However, the irrepressible return of theory from within late-globalization/Empire and its most serious current symptom, the war on terror, throws into question such dubious attacks on “theory” that reduce “it” to an abstract hermeneuticism now “over with.” Indeed, did the urgent need for rigorous, informed, self-searching critique *diminish* after 9/11?

My answer to this question—and the key assumption driving this dissertation—is an emphatic *no*: “Theory” has never been more urgently needed. Thankfully, I am not alone in this belief. Among these voices is David Simpson who calls for theory after 9/11, pointing to Jacques Derrida’s claim “a propos of 9/11, that we do not yet ‘know what we are talking about’” (9). Simpson goes on to unpack the significance of such a “theoretical” remark, writing that

the importance of Derrida’s claim that we do not yet know what we are talking about should still be the operational faith of useful inquiry. We should remain committed, in the words of another commentator, to ‘untimely utterances and awkward silences,’ to ‘examining what cannot or should not be said,’ and to ‘reflecting on the conditions of sayability and the unspeakable.’ But will there be time? There is no answer to the question. One can only hope that keeping faith with the traditions of critical reflection might somehow matter to a world that can be better than the one we have now. (11)

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see <http://mediamatters.org/items/200407210006>. The entire interview is featured in Robert Greenwald’s documentary *Outfoxed* (MoveOn.org, 2004).

Simpson constructs a concept of theory that resembles an act of faith.

Importantly, this is a faith that is necessary if one is to be *faithful* to the unknowability of an “event” such as 9/11, as well as to the possible future(s) to come of such an event. Moreover, Simpson implies, there is *no other option in good faith*. But will there be time? In fact, *urgency demands* such a slowing down and a more careful consideration of the unknowable outcomes of our actions *before it is too late...*

But if a theoretical inquiry into the meanings, effects, and conditions of possibility for understanding “post-9/11 ethics” is the pursuit of that which is *unknowable*, where do we start? A critical interrogation of ethics in Empire, I argue, in part involves tracing its spectral remainders; these include Derrida’s earlier critique of post-cold-war globalization which irrepressibly haunts and complexifies Hardt and Negri’s project. Such an unpacking of their project’s “method” works to better elucidate the contours and contradictions of Empire and its idealized ethico-political subject—a subject that I argue is thoroughly implicated in and in many ways coextensive with the one universalized in and through the Bush administration’s hegemonic post-9/11 ethical rhetoric.

As I have already indicated, Bush’s post-9/11 ethical rhetoric is undergoing a painful “auto-deconstruction” in concert with the disastrous war on terror and in particular with the ongoing destruction of Iraq. His rhetoric and its globalized effects, I argue, represent both the most dominant current symptoms *and* most intense proliferation of late-globalization/Empire. Derrida’s foreboding

critique of “globalization” in the mid-90s thus haunts Bush’s rhetoric, which serves as possibly the “worst” recent example of what Derrida calls the “plagues of the new world order.” Mimicking many of the standard operating procedures of global capitalism’s “psychopathic” drive for world dominance<sup>6</sup>—whose means that have become their own ends or “ethic”—Bush’s ethical rhetoric manufactures consent for the war on terror, in part, by normativizing and “ontologizing” a particular hegemonic neoconservative understanding of what 9/11 truly represents. This *particular* truth is then sold into service as a universal “wrong” that can only be made “right,” according to Bush and his supporters, by swift, sustained, and violent retribution. 9/11 therefore becomes an absolute ethical alibi orienting what the “*world*” wants and *needs*; the “tough” medicine it must swallow for its own “good.” Instructively, the state of “total war” brought about by Bush’s “war on terror”—his current cure for the world’s ills through killing, imprisoning, and torturing vast numbers of its members—argue Hardt and Negri, *just happens* to be a key operating principle of Empire. Yet, by and for whom and in whose interests the war on terror is being fought remains in doubt. Nonetheless, it is clear that Bush’s *universalizing* post-9/11 ethical rhetoric finds its conditions of possibility in the (nearly) totalizing technological, economic and military infrastructures of globalization/Empire. The wider effects and

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<sup>6</sup> See Joel Bakan’s book and documentary of the same name, *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power* (2003) for a detailed account of how corporations, endowed under “limited liability” legislation with legal status as “humans” with full human rights and protections under the law, as such, overwhelmingly display classic psychopathic behaviour in their a-moral, remorseless, and sociopathic treatment of other humans subject to the same laws in the relentless pursuit of profit.

resonances of this rhetoric, as well as the contours and closures of its universalized global ethical “subject,” become clearer when placed in the context of Empire and its historical, if not necessarily *dated*, hauntological remainders. What’s more, the “utopic,” totalizing tenor of the dominant post-9/11 ethical rhetoric surrounding the war on terror has more than a few resonances with the recent return, after postmodernism, to utopia, universality and “ethics.” In this way, the latest critical “cures,” if strategic in intent, resemble some of the worst ills urgently in need of critical interrogation. Such a course, as General Westmoreland once said of his helmsmanship of the U.S. war in Vietnam, is full of opportunity, yet fraught with dangers.

While I must admit to a personal prejudice in favour of the multitude and its politics, it seems necessary to slow down this impulse and more carefully examine the conditions of possibility for such a politics, particularly after 9/11. In short, my personal prejudices also include a “faith” in theory. Therefore, I’m going to hide my membership card for the multitude in my back pocket and play “double” agent. In other words, I will seek for “doubleness,” hidden resonances, and latent, spectral remainders haunting my comparative analysis of the ethico-political projects of Derrida, Hardt and Negri, and Bush. I will undertake this investigation of the paranormal—that which defies the “norms” of historical experience, refuses scientification, periodization, and is not ontologizable or “materialized/materialistic” as such—by employing Derrida’s concept of “hauntology.” This is his term for a de-ontologizing (*hau/onto-logical*) approach



to the spectral “eventness” of history, memory, and mourning work. Hauntology conceptualizes the “Spirits” of historical figures, concepts and events as always already existing as “Specters” that refuse reduction, containment, closure, “presence,” or periodization and that always take multiple, heterogeneous forms.

Rethinking the shift from cold-war globalization to the post-9/11 context of a globalized “war on terror” as an irreducible, non-periodizable *hauntology* achieves several things. First, it problematizes productively the totalizing a-historical sublimation of certain major “events” in the history of globalization (i.e. the view that 9/11 and the fall of the Berlin Wall served as almost extra-historical landmarks either “interrupting” or confirming the immanent arrival of neoconservative global dominance as the teleological end of the “natural” progress of human “Freedoms” such as free market capitalism and/or American hegemony’s freedom from ethico-politico dissent). Second, it problematizes the notion that these events somehow contain and/or are subject to transcendental “moral” content (for example, terror attacks as perpetrated by “evildoers” on an apocalyptic “day of fire,” imperative categories demarcating “good” vs. “bad” globalization, and a clear ideological division between those for and against “us,” and by association, those for and against Empire as an immanent and absolute moral paradigm organizing global ethical community, or the “good life”). Third, it interrogates the ways in which these “events” can be understood, not as historically dislocated *interruptions* or *aberrations in*, but in fact as *symptoms of* the more complex histories and dis/continuities of “globalization,” signaling its

suicidal autoimmunity. Finally, it interrogates the contemporary relevance of Derrida's critique of cold-war globalization and the promise of his concept of new Internationalism as a practical, realizable vision of democracy(/ies) to come, in and through the democratic tools, international infrastructures and institutions that we have *to hand*. Does new Internationalism still have any relevance in relation to Empire? Arguably, the particular plagues and promise of globalization, it seems, haven't so much changed as *intensified* with the onset of "Empire" and the "world-changing" post-9/11 period of total "war on terror." Thus, the promise of Hardt and Negri's project perhaps lies in the ways in which it represents a kind of *Specter of new Internationalism* which has "creatively" hypothesized one possible democratic imaginary "to come." Arguably, such a possibility is held open by the very "aporetic" structure of their argument and their concept of the multitude's resistance to ontological (if not *onto-linguistic*) "closure."

In short, I argue that many of the continuities and crises held over from post-cold-war globalization now haunting post-9/11 Empire—crises that arguably reach their peak intensities in Bush's post-9/11 ethical rhetoric and its effects—can be mapped via the hauntological remainders of Derrida's *Specters of Marx* spectrally evoked in Hardt and Negri's *Empire* and *Multitude*. Accordingly, this chapter organizes its critique of the post-9/11 ethical rhetoric in Empire around a few of the key hauntological synchronicities between these texts, including Derrida's quasi-utopic, "two-handed" deconstructive critique of Internationalism, in contrast with Hardt and Negri's similarly bifurcated

deconstructive/strategically-utopic method for critiquing Empire; Derrida's non-citizen of new Internationalism, in contrast with Hardt and Negri's "singular" non-subject of the multitude; and Derrida's attention to the unforeseeable radical alterity to globalization and Internationalism (what Levinas calls the "third" mediating ethical element for which there is no politically conceptualizable substitute), in contrast with Hardt and Negri's ethical concern with passing through to the end of Empire *and* its strategic, self-deconstructive supplement the multitude. These broader spectral resonances are, however, difficult to isolate, as they are inextricably at play in and through one another. Therefore, they are further broken down in this chapter into the following sub-groupings: the "post-postmodern" questions of utopia and the remainders of deconstruction; Derrida's concept of "hauntology," including the specters of Shakespeare haunting Derrida's and Bush's ethico-political rhetorics; the key spectral "events" historically linking, but not *dating*, Derrida's, Hardt and Negri's, and Bush's conceptualizations of Empire; and Hardt and Negri's concept of multitude in contrast to Derrida's concept of new Internationalism.

I also interrogate certain spectral key terms haunting these texts, including: "the third"; "non-messianistic messianism"; "immanence"; "mourning work"; "freedom"; "democracy"; "justice"; and "utopia." My "hauntological" unpacking of these specters of ethics in Empire implies a particular approach to "ethics" and the ethical "human" subject meant to refuse their reduction and/or "universalization" in post-9/11 ethical rhetorics such as President Bush's, which

affords them transcendental moral content. Conversely, my intention is to leave these specters of ethics “open” to a justice that is required *now*, yet never definitively decidable (or “spiritually” grounded) and thus always to come. Such a reading of these key ethical concepts, therefore, doesn’t *necessarily* evoke the retributive violence of state terrorism or a universalization of what is good, bad, evil, and/or reducible to “terror.” Arguably, Hardt and Negri chart such a course with their quasi-utopic project of the multitude and its singularities-in-common against Empire. However, their reconnoitering of the contemporary ethico-political context of Empire—*particularly* after 9/11—I argue, benefits by a look “back” to the future(s) to come of Derrida’s similar critique.

*Beyond Postmodernity, Strategic-Utopianism, and the Reminders of  
Deconstruction*

The central issue for Hardt and Negri in *Empire* regarding “deconstruction” is whether or not it is still a useful mode of critiquing the “virtual,” deterritorialized “post-postmodern” (or Utopic) context of Empire.<sup>7</sup> 9/11 has made even more urgent a debate (largely amongst “the left”) over what is to be done in response to the myriad crises connected with late-globalization/Empire, of which the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent war on terror are only the most recent. For Hardt and Negri, one thing

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<sup>7</sup> For an informed discussion of the political stakes of utopia in current leftist and anti-globalization debates, see Fredric Jameson’s introduction, entitled “Utopia Now,” to his recent book *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2007), xi-xvi.

seems clear: deconstruction is over with. In their words: “With this passage [to Empire] the deconstructive phase of critical thought, which from Heidegger and Adorno to Derrida provided a powerful instrument for the exit from modernity, has lost its effectiveness” (217). Their reasoning is that while “there is a long tradition of modern critique dedicated to denouncing the dualisms of modernity” from within its general texts, such a critical tradition

is situated in the paradigmatic place of modernity itself, both ‘inside’ and ‘outside,’ at the threshold or the point of crisis. What has changed in the passage to the imperial world, however, is that this border place no longer exists, and thus the modern critical strategy tends no longer to be effective. (183)

While the “general text” of modernity, in other words, is characterized by a perceived crisis between those *knowledges and ideas* that it reflectively reproduces and “stays within,” and the *essential, originary substance* that orients and stabilizes those truths, no such subject-object problem exists in Empire, according to Hardt and Negri. Empire just *is*. God isn’t dead; he has been subsumed—indeed overtaken—by Empire.

Some key assumptions underwriting this passage are that “modernity” was comprised of more or less definable borders, and that such a historical paradigm is definitively in the past (or *post-*). Those critiques defined as “modern” and even “post-modern,” therefore, if once important and effective, have lost their orienting objects and are now irrelevant. And yet, such an assessment perhaps too quickly dates and dismisses those “hauntological” remainders of modernity that even the “post” in some “postmodern” critiques underestimates. Indeed, are those critiques

circumscribable by a defined “date” (say, 1994—the year many critics associate with the inauguration of “utopia” as the contemporary “post-postmodern” critical paradigm<sup>8</sup>), their remains ontologized and memorializable as such? Can we detect in such a dismissal of “deconstruction” as Hardt and Negri’s, a loss of “faith” in the effectiveness of “overly belaboured” or “nit-picking” critiques of infrastructures (such as “utopia”) in lieu of a reinvestment in the political “creativity” and/or strategic “tangibility” offered by identity politics? I am not convinced that Hardt and Negri’s project is nearly as straight forward as to imply a simple rejection or embrace of either deconstruction or utopia.

For them, the “definitive” shift to the “post-postmodern” context of Empire has produced an “ontological vacuum” that doesn’t require a deconstruction. Instead, they suggest, counteracting Empire requires a “lovingly”<sup>9</sup> creative approach, productive of more utopic, or “ethically responsible” ontology. Their approach is thus clearly in dialogue with Giorgio Agamben’s concept of “linguistic ontology,” a term coined in his book *The Coming Community*. This concept resembles the biopolitical “shape” of the

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, the collected papers from the University of Chicago’s “After Postmodernism” conference in 1997. Available online at: <<http://www.focusing.org/apm.htm> and <http://www.focusing.org/apm.htm#Online%20Papers>>. See also John McGowan’s entry on “Postmodernism” in the *Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Johns Hopkins UP, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> See *Empire*, p. 78, 115, 186, 388, & 413. In the last few sentences of their text, Hardt and Negri characterize their creative project as a type of productive biopolitics whose “militancy makes resistance into counterpower and makes rebellion into a project of love” (413). Love, here, represents a kind of mad attachment, or “irrational” utopic association which can replace the “hated” Empire. One problem that arises, here, is that such a biopolitics of creationism, instead of operating in a “new” realm outside of the “older” modernist dualisms deconstructed by Derrida and other so-called “postmodernists,” instead founds itself in direct opposition to Empire, and thus

multitude in *Empire*—as the privileged political organization of “singularities-in-common” organized under the contingent, linguistically ontological banner of the multitude as “being against.”<sup>10</sup>

An immediate problem arising in Hardt and Negri’s assessment of “the now” is that they must create a kind of straw man called “postmodern theory” in order to dismiss Derrida and “deconstruction,” both of which are “proper names” that cannot be definitively attached to each other, nor to any particular “method,” period (except perhaps to a certain degree the Enlightenment), theorist, or theoretical movement. Indeed, there are many specters of “deconstruction,” none of which are solely reducible to “Derrida,” even if his remains the most important “spirit” driving the specters of deconstruction as such. What’s more, *de-con-*struction is a term indebted to Heidegger’s term “destruction”—a kind of method for taking apart the “ontological” (or beingness of phenomena) obscuring the “ontic” (the essence of the thing itself). Derrida refigures Heidegger’s temporal poetics of being as an aporia: *de-con-*struction. Derrida’s term builds upon Heidegger’s “poeticization” of Husserl’s scientifism and Hegel’s negative

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already inside and apart of its master narrative. This creative act of “love” thus founds its object of desire in opposition to its orienting dualism *Empire*—what it “hates.”

<sup>10</sup> I had a brief conversation with Antonio Negri on this point during a seminar that he gave at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, on April 19, 2006. While he admitted a personal and professional fondness for Agamben, Negri nonetheless criticized his contemporary’s critiques of power and biopolitical collectivity as largely a-historical and abstract. The ontological priority of Hardt and Negri’s concept of the multitude, and its obvious debt to Agamben’s “linguistic ontology” as a thinking of singularity-in-common (a concept obviously in dialogue with Nancy’s thinking of singularity), therefore, represents an intriguing tension between the deconstructive and historical/positivist critiques at play in, through, and against each other in Hardt’s and Negri’s books *Empire* and *Multitude*, a tension that does not seem to be resolvable, nor reducible to merely one or more of the many “spectral” remainders at play in the key concepts of those texts.

critique, yet refuses Heidegger's presumption that his temporal poetics necessarily refers to ontic content. Derridian deconstruction thus contains a similar "double" gesture as Hardt and Negri's bifurcated "deconstructive" *and* creatively utopic method. Derridian deconstruction (if such a thing exists), however, perhaps places even more self-reflexive emphasis on even its own infrastructural limits as an approach to given "texts," conceptual structures, and systematicity.

Mikhail Epstein suggests that since roughly 1994 and the rebirth of "utopia" after postmodernism, what has changed is that the quotation marks have come off ("The Place of Postmodernism in Postmodernity," n.p.). Derrida's earlier "erasure" of ontology, however, is not necessarily an outright rejection of that concept, but instead signals an awareness that the conditions of possibility for any given ontological and/or utopic structure are its spectral supplementarity and non-presence. Any ontology is thus always already "over with" in certain ways. It seems ironic, therefore—or perhaps *strategic*—that Hardt and Negri's concern with the "virtual," shifting nature of biopolitical "life" and the deterritorialized conditions of possibility for sovereignty in Empire leads them to *reject* Derrida. The many ways in which Hardt and Negri's project is in dialogue with and in fact builds upon Derrida's thought would lead them, one would think, to underscore and expand upon his work instead of memorializing it, localizing its remains, and definitively consigning it to the "past." Derrida's spectral reading of Marx, for example, as a thinker who irrepressibly lives on in multiple and irreducible ways, models a more hospitable approach to critical inheritance than Hardt and Negri's



treatment of Derrida, or even Marx. On the other hand, perhaps their “rejection” of Derrida instead works as an *exorc-analysis* (exorcism/analysis)—Derrida’s hauntological term for a rejection or “exorcism” that, through the work of analysis, serves simultaneously as an invocation and transformation (*Specters of Marx* 47)—and is thus an example of their projects “two handed” method.

### *The “Method” of Multitude*

The multitude, for Hardt and Negri, is meant to replace the antiquated concept of “the people,” a form of citizenship they associate with the older, modernist identity politics of national and international institutionality. Their concept of biopolitics thus takes up—then quickly parts company with—Michel Foucault’s earlier conceptualization of biopower. His concept, argue Hardt and Negri, is tied to “institutionality” which cannot adequately grasp Empire’s supra-national, deterritorialized modes of subjectivity, virtuality, sovereignty, and resistance.

The multitude’s collective desire to *be against*<sup>11</sup> Empire evokes a utopic, ontological concept of politicized “life,” but in the *strategically* essentialist form of “singularities-in-common,” or being-in-common. Being-in-common is a concept indebted to Giorgio Agamben’s “linguistic ontology”—a kind of politicized “example” or substitutable banner under which political organization and action can occur without the essentialist obligation of “being” anything. The

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<sup>11</sup> See Hardt’s and Negri’s *Empire*, pages 210-214.

linguistic ontology of the example is nonetheless irreducible to the singularity of any one individual's essenceless and irreducibly plural "whatever" being.<sup>12</sup> This singular "life-in-common," Hardt and Negri hope, can overtake the biopolitical production of life subject to Empire.

In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri outline their project's two-pronged methodology for creating such utopic forms of "life" as the multitude, explaining that both methods

are intended to be nondialectical and absolutely immanent: the first is *critical and deconstructive*, aiming to subvert the hegemonic languages and social structures and thereby reveal an alternative ontological basis that resides in the creative and productive practices of the multitude; the second is *constructive and ethico-political*, seeking to lead the processes of the production of subjectivity toward the constitution of an effective social, political alternative, a new constituent power. (47)

By "nondialectical," Hardt and Negri imply that their two approaches to critiquing Empire—the first a kind of negative critique modeled after "deconstruction" and the second a utopic political program meant as a strategic alternative to Empire—are not meant to complement each other, and that they may even be in contradiction with one another. It seems assured, however, that the juxtaposition of such seemingly opposed methodologies will produce particular dialectical effects. A further commonality between these methods, say Hardt and Negri, is that they are both "absolutely immanent," which evokes Gilles Deleuze's concept of "pure immanence." Deleuze's metaphysical and/or ontological term refers to

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<sup>12</sup> See Giorgio Agamben's *The Coming Community* for more in-depth discussions of "whatever being," "linguistic ontology," and "singularity." In Chapter 2, I undertake a more detailed discussion of these terms in relation to Jean Luc Nancy's related concept of singularity which recedes from political associations and community.

the “plane of immanence”—a philosophical conceptualization of existence and the conditions under which it is produced and/or “lived” which are in opposition to the plane of transcendence. Immanence is understood to be human-driven. In other words, it expresses an ontological concept of human existence as completely immersed or embedded in its own socio-discursive context. Immanence is directly opposed to the concept of transcendence, which is the idea that an external “Reality” or God orders the universe. For Hardt and Negri to say that both sides of their critique—the deconstructive and the utopic—are contradictory yet equally *immanent* suggests a kind of doubleness in the very object of their critique—Empire—which thus requires—indeed immanently *demands*—such a “schizophrenic” approach.

There is another commonality, however, that from the start brings both sides of their critique much more in line than they suggest. Both Hardt and Negri’s concept of “deconstructive critique” and their concept of “utopic political resistance” via the multitude are 1) rooted in “the social” and 2) both concerned with the ontological. In other words, the particular plane of immanence—a decidedly Deleuzian one—on which Hardt and Negri base their rather totalizing political project presupposes an all-encompassing social-discursive ground on which biopolitics operates; a ground which is itself grounded in a kind of ontological materialism—or tabula rasa of the material—which is immanently affected—without mediation—by “the social.”

The overall strategy of this *de/constructivist*-utopic approach to late-globalization is to incorporate a rigorously self-reflexive critique of “Empire” into a more strategically utopic, contingently ontological strategy of providing an alternative to it—a “new constituent power” to counter what they characterize in Deleuzian terms as Empire’s “society of control.” In the absence of such a *creatively* immanent constituent power, argue Hardt and Negri, the productive, desiring forces of the multitude to “be against” Empire have no way of expressing themselves and no way of organizing their diverse singularities into what Hardt and Negri refer to at one point as an association similar to a “global trade union.”

And yet, like Derrida’s rejection of ontology which, nonetheless, leaves such a concept open and spectrally in play, deconstruction haunts Hardt and Negri’s project as an irrepressible spectral remainder complicating and complexifying their critique of globalization. According to their text, this clearly entails a strategically self-directed “auto-deconstruction.” Thus, far from memorializing deconstruction’s “remains” and moving on, *Empire* and *Multitude* can be read instead as *exorc-analyzing* the specters of Derridian deconstruction by putting them irreducibly in play in, through, and against Hardt and Negri’s more “utopic” approach.

### *The “Non-Method” of the New International*

One such deconstructive specter haunting Hardt and Negri is Derrida’s new Internationalism, which he lays out in *Specters of Marx*. While not an

outright rejection of globalization's "general text," new Internationalism is an attempt to reconcile its democratizing promise with the obvious problems and self-destructive tendencies of its more dogmatic, neoconservative specters.

Derrida explains that new Internationalism is thus

a link of affinity, suffering, and hope, a still discreet, almost secret link [...] but more and more visible, we have more than one sign of it. It is an untimely link, without status, without title, and without name, barely public even if it is not clandestine, without contract, 'out of joint,' without coordination, without party, without country, without national community (International before, across, and beyond any national determination), without co-citizenship, without common belonging to a class. The name of new International is given here to what calls to the friendship of an alliance without institution among those who, even if they no longer believe or never believed in the socialist-Marxist International, in the dictatorship of the proletariat, in the messiano-eschato-logical role of the universal union of the proletarians of all lands, continue to be inspired by at least one of the spirits of Marx or of Marxism (they now know that there is *more than one*) and in order to ally themselves, in a new, concrete, and real way, even if this alliance no longer takes the form of a party or of a workers' international, but rather of a kind of counter-conjuration, in the (theoretical and practical) critique of the state of international law, the concepts of State and nation, and so forth: in order to renew this critique and especially to radicalize it. (85-86)

This passage can perhaps be read as Derrida's statement of "faith" in, or "friendship" for, the spirits of Marx and Marxism, while rejecting its more "materialized" spectral forms and what Derrida calls Marx's "pre-deconstructive" ontological strain.<sup>13</sup> This passage positions Derrida not as a "utopic" thinker of a

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<sup>13</sup> Derrida's critique of Marx's ontologism is taken to task by many critics of Marx and Derrida. For example, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Ghostwriting" (1995), Aijaz Ahmad's "Reconciling Derrida: 'Specters of Marx' and Deconstructive Politics" in *Ghostly Demarcations* (1999) (Ahmad's critique centers on what he calls "the *real* occasion of this text: Derrida's affiliation with the Marxist heritage" (90), a phrase evoking the tension between Ahmad's and Derrida's differing concepts of material "reality" and historical "presence"), and from the same book, Antonio Negri's "The Specter's Smile" (1999) (Negri, like Ahmad, takes issue with

“new” proletarian class, but more as a radicalizer of traditional political forms such as international law, the nation-state, citizenship, and the juridical infrastructures propping up such phantasmatic concepts. The “promise” held out by the proletariat, Derrida suggests in the above passage, is not in its onto-political “creation” of an entirely “new” politics, but in Marx’s own inspiring proto-deconstruction of capitalism and international democratic institutionality organized around capitalist motives. (Of course, many critics beg to differ with such an assessment of the promise and pitfalls of Marxism(s)!) A “truly global” proletariat, Derrida proposes, if it were to follow the rigorous, radicalizing “spirit” of a Marxist critique, would have to extend, unconditionally, beyond any given political concept of the “proletariate” as such. Such a de-ontologizing of the proletariat is necessary, Derrida suggests, if we are to keep it *open*, in question, and thus do justice to what such a concept might have to offer in its possible future(s) to come as a “democratic” approach to politics. In this way, Derrida’s quasi-utopic collectivity of new Internationalism seems very much informed by both Marx and Jean-Luc Nancy, whose thinking of the limits of political subjectivity, particularly with his concept of “singularity,” suggests that the “freedom” of a singular “individual” obtains in their always receding from any ontologizable politics or subjective “essences.”

In contrast to such an open, non-citizenship of the new International, Derrida cites the so-called smooth historical “progress” from modernity to late-

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Derrida’s de-ontologization of Marxism, a move which Negri seems to worry will rob it of its

globalization at the end of the cold war. Derrida argues that this teleological “ending” to the unfolding story of “human history,” as it was triumphantly proclaimed by neoconservatives, is fundamentally “out-of-joint.” “*The Time* [of globalization, its periodicity, prescribed dates, and ontological “content” attached to such dating] *is out-of-joint.*” Echoing Marx, Derrida identifies ten “plagues of the new world order”—a nowhere near exhaustive list. How can a neo-capitalist, neo-liberal discourse of globalization be said to have “succeeded,” indeed, to have marked the triumphal “end” of human progress, asks Derrida, when it is plagued by perpetual, implacable

1. Unemployment [...]
2. The massive exclusion of homeless citizens from any participation in the democratic life of States, the expulsion or deportation of so many exiles, stateless persons, and immigrants from a so-called national territory [...]
3. The ruthless economic war among the countries of the European Community themselves, between them and the Eastern European countries, between Europe and the United States and between Europe, the United States, and Japan. [A] war [that] controls everything [...]
4. The inability to master the contradictions in the concept, norms, and reality of the free market (the barriers of a protectionism and the interventionist bidding wars of capitalist States seeking to protect their nationals, or even Westerners or Europeans in general, from cheap labor, which often has no comparable social protection) [...]
5. The aggravation of the foreign debt and other connected mechanisms are starving or driving to despair a large portion of humanity [...]
6. The arms industry and trade (whether it be ‘conventional’ arms or at the cutting edge of tele-technological sophistication) are inscribed in the normal regulation of the scientific research, economy, and socialization of labor in Western democracies [...]

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historical reversion to ontological “reality” to ground materialist anti-capitalist critiques).

7. The spread (“dissemination”) of nuclear weapons, maintained by the very countries that say they want to protect themselves from it, is no longer even controllable, as was the case for a long time, by statist structures. It exceeds not only statist control but every declared market [...]

8. Inter-ethnic wars (have there ever been another kind?) are proliferating, driven by an *archaic* phantasm and concept, by a *primitive conceptual phantasm* of community, the nation-State, sovereignty, borders, native soil and blood [...]

9. How can one ignore the growing and undelimitable, that is, worldwide power of those super-efficient and properly capitalist phantom-States that are the mafia and the drug cartels on every continent, including in the former so-called socialist States of Eastern Europe? [...]

10. For above all, above all, one would have to analyze the present state of international law and of its institutions. (81-83)

The dubious proposition that globalization has produced *only* the “ten plagues” so succinctly summarized here—much like an economic report—is telegraphed to be inadequate even by the roundness of the number of this list. The number is *at least* ten, Derrida clearly suggests. What’s worse, the less obvious and perhaps even more far reaching side-effects of these plagues are innumerable and, to be sure, there will be many many more to come.

Furthermore, each of these spectral plagues, viewed differently, also represents specters of *success*, of globalization working precisely the way it was designed to. Unemployment, from a different perspective, is an economic *success* for the business that was able to trim its workforce and become more profitable. This is often achieved, for example, by abandoning a factory in one country where a cycle of dependence upon transnational industry has already been established and moving the operation to another where labour costs are even



lower, leaving the former workforce in a state of upheaval and helplessness.<sup>14</sup> Homelessness, viewed differently, is a spectacular *success* when it means that estateless citizens have been displaced from lower income housing to make way for much more profitable building projects for upwardly mobile, tax-paying citizens. Just such a mass displacement of estateless citizens took place in Vancouver, ostensibly to make way for its 1986 World Expo.<sup>15</sup> It became clear, however, that the move was designed as a long term urban “rejuvenation” project when the former low-rent buildings were replaced with ultra-expensive condominium projects—which was the plan all along. The “ruthless economic war,” viewed differently, is a surprising *success*, particularly in the way in which the missionary work of globalization has so decisively converted most of the world’s nations into pawns in the global economic process. If “freedom” and “democracy” are largely synonymous with free markets and trade liberalization, then this “war” begins to resemble a global “love-in.” The same twisted ethical turn can be performed with each of Derrida’s points. Even the global mafioso, viewed differently—specifically, from the ethico-political bottom-line of economics—is productive in its own way. It is a massively profitable business, which creates jobs and indeed an entire subterranean global economy. Even the massive law-enforcement infrastructure devoted to policing the mafioso can be

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<sup>14</sup> See Jed Greer and Kavaljit Singh. “A Brief History of Transnational Corporations,” *Global Policy Forum* (2000): n.p. 19 Mar 2008.  
<<http://www.globalpolicy.org/soecon/tncs/historytncs.htm>>

<sup>15</sup> See Serra Tinic. “Global Vistas and Local Reflections: Negotiating Place and Identity in Vancouver Television,” *Television and New Media* 7.2 (2006): 154-83.

understood, from a global economic perspective, to be an extremely profitable industry—for armaments, personnel, tax-dollars, burial costs, even jobs for those health-care workers entrusted with caring for those whose lives have been torn apart by these brutal, lawless people.

Derrida draws attention here to a longer history of nationalistic, ethnic, mafioso, state, and militaristic conflicts all connected to ancient communities and collectivities, as well as the communities of “non-citizens” such as the homeless, that relentlessly haunt the “globalized” world as its irrepressible excess.

All these “plagues” thus represent internal *humanitarian* crises within globalization which contradict its supposed “universality,” yet at the same time—from the perspective of the strained ethical logic of economics—are pages torn from its “success story.” Indeed, many of these plagues are either ignored or are unrecognizable within the conceptual filters and myopic cost-benefit analysis associated with contemporary globalization. The homeless—a group whose condition is produced and exacerbated by globalization—for instance, have never really been viewed as a community with rights, but as a problem *infringing* on the rights of city-dwellers and property-owners confronted with the “shocking” spectacle of poverty and displacement. As such, “homeless” is often euphemized as “joblessness,” “laziness,” or merely as a social disease associated with mental illness—the link between global economic imperialism and the ways in which it *dis-places* vast numbers of people and often *drives* them to despair is rarely made. These crises, Derrida argues, have thus never been solved by the “immanent

arrival” of globalization, and have in fact grown much worse in spite of globalization’s idealist presuppositions to ontologically uniting and universalizing the world as an immanent globalized “democracy.”

These internal crises, ancient collectivities and non-collectivities, Derrida says, are “phantasms,” but with long, complex histories and violent effects attached to them. “Above all, above all” emphasizes Derrida, the urgency of these crises requires that they be dealt with *now*, by analyzing the *present* state of “international law and [...] its institutions.” Even with the onset of post-postmodernity after 1994 or so and its “utopic” twist,<sup>16</sup> the biopolitics of globalization are still most directly negotiated, effected and protected by nation-states (like the U.S.), international laws and trans-national institutions. While multi-national corporations have certainly created “alternative realities” in which they operate seemingly unchecked in the “supra-national” contexts of global financialization, arguably a large part of the practical means we have *to hand* of regulating globalized corporations, virtual network structures, and nodal organizations of “humanity,” still seems to be the “bad old” national and international laws, internationally recognized NGOs such as Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch, and national and international institutions such as the United Nations. Rushing too quickly to embrace “ethical” cures for

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<sup>16</sup> See “Postmodernism” in *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Johns Hopkins UP, 2005).

globalization's ills often means we ignore the unforeseeable possibility that they could become future plagues.

New Internationalism thus represents a kind of “utopic” faith in the promise of international democratic institutions—those laws, states, nations, and institutions we have *to hand* in which recourse and radicalizations of human rights and freedoms are located *now*. In a familiar Derridian turn, the first mention of new Internationalism in *Specters of Marx* presents it as a kind of aporetic, dual-figure of exorcism and analysis, or *exorc-analysis*:

A time of the world, today, in these times, a new ‘world order’ seeks to stabilize a new, necessarily new disturbance [*dérèglement*] by installing an unprecedented form of hegemony. It is a matter, then, but as always, of a novel form of war. It at least resembles a great ‘conjunction’ against Marxism, a ‘conjurement’ of Marxism [...] (the idea of a new International), and to combat an International by exorcising it. (50)

Derrida suggests here that the “New World Order” (a term coined by U.S. President Bush Sr. and haunted by the phrase’s Nazi origins—for example, the phrase “new order” favoured by Goebbels<sup>17</sup>) stabilizes its meaning largely through an exorcism of Marx, and thus *contains* a particular specter of Marx as one of its key orienting others. Likewise, the new International has (on the surface) as much investment in neoliberal globalization’s “general text” and in international institutions as it does in the specter(s) of Marxism as a proto-deconstructive critique. In fact, Derrida’s political project of new Internationalism is staged as one possible “quasi-utopic” future for democracy

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<sup>17</sup> See Joseph Goebbels. “The New Year 1940-41,” *German Propaganda Archive* (1941): n.p. 19 Mar 2008 <<http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/goeb19.htm>>

that, as a doing “justice” to the possible futures of democracy/ies to come, occupies the very “undeconstructible” ethico-political limits of deconstruction itself.

Derrida focuses on the urgent need for these institutional avenues of redress and rights right now, yet opens them up to that radical alterity possibly most in need of rights and of democracy’s possible future(s) to come. This leads to his concept of new Internationalism’s citizenship *without* citizenship—a kind of stubborn attachment to citizenship that nonetheless holds it and any of its “ontologizing effects” always in question. In the new International, the responsibilities and obligations of nation-states to their citizens and non-citizens alike are understood to extend unconditionally beyond the nation-state’s capacities for politically conceptualizing hospitality, ethics, and politics.

New Internationalism thus clearly owes a debt to Hannah Arendt’s critique of stateless citizenship, a situation that she saw thousands of migrant Jews faced with after WWII and their so-called “liberation” from fascism. Her approach to this issue—particularly in chapter nine of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, “The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man”—includes a kind of quasi-deconstruction of the concepts of humanity and citizenship. Arendt’s rigorous historical analysis in that chapter of these terms reveals them to be thoroughly coextensive, in spite of the wider assumption that citizenship contains transcendental “ethical” grounding in “human subjectivity.” In her words,

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speaking of the stateless Jew in the post-WWII European context, “once they had left their state they became stateless; once they had been deprived of their human rights they were rightless, the scum of the earth” (267). Statelessness and the recinding of human rights are juxtaposed in this passage, pointing to the sovereign exception over the very humanity of these Jews that their lack of citizenship seems to imply. Without citizenship, no human rights and without human rights, no humanity—one is for all intents and purposes the “scum of the earth.” Only through citizenship, the passage implies, is humanity recognized as such.

In short, the “spirit” of humanity is conceivable only in and through such ethico-political specters as national citizenship. Arendt writes that many Jews who had suffered the horrors of the Holocaust and were in dire need of International human rights protections had fled oppressive national situations, and thus were without citizenship and/or recognition as humans with rights. Given that national and international citizenship is so closely tied with the concept and juridical infrastructures of human rights, a lack of citizenship left these migrant Jews without even the right to have rights, yet with an absolute reluctance to be repatriated—thus, constituting a complex disavowal of citizenship which Derrida’s concept of citizenship *without* citizenship is clearly in dialogue with.<sup>18</sup> Recourse to justice, humanitarian relief, and “human” rights were supposedly restored to the victims of Nazi fascism in the wake of WWII, but not for those

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<sup>18</sup> See Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, chapter 9.

individuals who needed them most. In short, non-citizenship, for all intents and purposes, is equivalent to being non-human.

Citizenship in Empire, argue Hardt and Negri, has changed and complexified, no longer comprehensible simply in terms of sovereign associations like nation-states or “the people.” Nonetheless, this same basic subject-object problem identified by Arendt is, in my view, still a fundamental problematic haunting Empire, as exemplified by the post-9/11 ethical rhetoric of the “war on terror.” Arendt’s critique, which contains a residual essentialist notion of what constitutes “human” freedom and the ultimate evil which oppresses it, is expanded upon and complexified in Giorgio Agamben’s work on the sovereign exception over “bare life.” Further, Agamben importantly brings his critique of the exclusionary politics of the “ethical” term “humanity” to bear on President Bush’s sovereign exceptionalist exclusion of the singular lives of Guantanamo Bay prisoners. Exactly who gets to decide who is a “terrorist” and whose violence is a necessary force of law in support of acceptable human citizenship? With humanity still presupposed in global biopolitics to be a transcendental “ethical” universalism devoid of “politics”—a sentiment expressed often in the hegemonic post-9/11 ethical rhetoric of President Bush—yet simultaneously held to be precludable in “extreme” circumstances—i.e. when the excesses and exclusions of the transcendently-held “law” become too visible or uncontainable—, things haven’t changed much since Arendt laid out the problem with such urgency and clarity after WWII.

Derrida's new Internationalism seeks to address the urgent need for—and yet exclusionary nature of—International “citizenship.” For Derrida, international citizenship—the “political” condition of possibility for global humanist “ethics” today—should remain open to that unforeseeable alterity, such as the stateless Jews championed by Arendt, who are most in need of the protections and safe haven of rights, yet are not reducible to “citizenship” as such. Indeed, no one is reducible to idealized “citizenship,” but many of us, for example here in Canada, rely on our documented citizenship on a daily bases—our health cards, birth certificates, passports, driver's license, all signs of membership in the group granted rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. But what about those “humans” who don't show up on the biopolitical radar of human rights and privileges granted with Canadian citizenship—for example, those gripped by the plague of homelessness that Derrida identifies as having worsened with globalization? How do we definitively recognize “humanity” when we see it? The ways in which American legislation like the Patriot Act and copy-cat legislations around the world, including Canada's security certificate are renegotiating and in some cases rolling-back the rights of citizenship represented by these signifiers and documents symbolizing citizenship is of key concern after 9/11. Even in the “supra-national” context of Empire, Derrida's critique productively underlines the ways in which these “institutional” Specters of citizenship in a large way *comprises* citizenship as an imperfect, yet productive social safety-net and avenue for redressing wrongs and accessing “rights.” The



stakes of protecting such signifiers of “national” identity, particularly after 9/11, therefore, are arguably still very high, in spite of what Hardt and Negri’s critique seems to suggest. This is because these signs of citizenship represent some of the specific, practical sites in which singular *bodies* are presently struggling for rights and recognition—struggles not unrelated but nonetheless irreducible to the global collective “spirit” that Hardt and Negri call the multitude against Empire.

In order to do justice to the non-citizen most in need of rights, the new International ties itself in practical ways to the specters of institutionalities past and present—the promise of democracy *now*, with the “utopic” democratic tools we have *to hand*. For Derrida, however, these democratic institutions are only “democratic” insofar as they remain open to rejecting their laws and conceptual finitudes in favour of performatively and/or *democratically* adapting to their own multiple, heterogeneous, and unimaginable spectral forms to come. Otherwise, “democracies” are not doing justice to the “utopic” promise of their own concepts. What else *can* we do? Are those crises of the new world order, particularly after 9/11, not important or urgent enough to start solving *now* as opposed to in some utopic future?

And yet, a nagging concern: Can post-9/11 globalization *as such* ever become “just” when it has inspired such hatred, racial division, perpetual war and violence abroad? Derrida’s paleonymic concept of the new International is not meant to “replace” one ontologically totalizing discourse of internationalism and/as globalization with another. Instead it stays within the “general text” of

globalization, offering an alternative way of operating globally *within* it in order to better realize its utopic promise as a universal ethical-community linking humanity/ies and their possible future(s) to come in more justly realized and open-ended ways. This it has in common with Hardt and Negri's concept of the multitude. But is this good enough?

Take, for example, Derrida's list of plagues: far from being cured, they have instead worsened and spread since the end of the cold war and the post-9/11 era of Empire. This cancerous "progress" has made painfully obvious that the largely neoconservative political will to Empire which drives globalization is in contradiction with its egalitarian "ethical" ends. The tragedy of 9/11, far from "interrupting the pastoral calm" of globalization's progress as Bush Jr. now claims, is instead linked with those very plagues summarized in *Specters of Marx*, underscoring the ongoing relevance of Derrida's critique as a specter haunting Empire and its "*founding*" contradictions and "*inaugural*" suicidal autoimmunity chronotopically linked to the earliest invocations of globalization. And yet, the biggest problem with current globalization is that it has never been "global." If there were an actual utopic attempt made to open up the infrastructures of globalization to serve all those it *already purports* to serve, to feed them first, instead of only the real ideal (non-)human human citizen of globalization—the psychopathic multinational corporation—this would be a "truly" democratizing step towards a more hospitable, "global" globalization. However, this would require an opening to what Derrida and Levinas call an ethics of the "third."

*Ethics/Politics and the Third*

For Levinas, the third is that infinitely excessive, irreducible otherness that always mediates any relation to an other, rendering that encounter always in flux and incalculable. The third thus radically exceeds and ultimately refuses any apparent calculability of dialectical or political relations. In *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, Levinas explains that “the third is other than the neighbor, but also another neighbor, and also a neighbor of the other, and not simply his fellow. What then are the other and the third for one another” (157)? This irreducible singularity infinitely distancing face-to-face ethical relations “is of itself the limit of responsibility and the birth of the question: What do I have to do with justice” (157)? What is inferred here by Levinas is that doing “justice” to the other is only “just” if what this justice might entail always remains open and in question. Moreover, while we *must* be just to the other, this is limited only by doing justice to the unknowable third. Justice for one may be fundamentally unjust to the “third,” or to that infinite range of others touched by that same other. What’s more, the unforeseeable interruption of the third—or absolute, unknowable singularity of the “other”—makes doing justice even to the “face” of the other only ever a speculative—if for Levinas a *fundamentally* necessary—effort. We never know how the third is operating on the other or the self, mediating and distancing the ethical face-to-face relation. Thus, for Levinas, if “ethics” is to remain ethical it must always be kept in question. As Jacques

Derrida explains, “the third interrupts (distances) without interrupting (distancing) the face to face with the irreplaceable singularity of the other” (Derrida, *Adieu*, 136-7, n.17). The third renders the politicized specter of the “face” infinitely and irreducibly singular, and thus is never adequate to its political concepts (the Said). This is why, for Derrida, ethics does not presuppose an ultimate decidability, but only ever points towards what he calls in his essay “Force of Law” a kind of “madness” in the irreducible attempt to do “justice” to the other (254).

But what are the consequences of thinking the “third”—a fundamental ethical consideration for Derrida and Levinas—as something otherwise than the being of the multitude—Hardt and Negri’s globalized ethico-political subject?

A key limitation of the multitude when read alongside Levinasian ethics is also identifiable in Heidegger’s concept of Dasein. Levinas states in *Totality and Infinity* that “Dasein in Heidegger is never hungry. Food can be interpreted as an implement only in a world of exploitation” (134). In other words, for Levinas, Dasein—Heidegger’s most fundamental figure of (human) being—lacks a key “human” element which could allow humans access to a common empathy, relationality, and even “enjoyment” for one another: hunger for food thought of as something radically other than just the implement, or fuel, of labour within the economy of capitalist production. To feed the other—with food meant for one’s own mouth—is, for Levinas, a foundational ethical act which proceeds from my fundamental obligation or responsibility—beyond the “law” and beyond “ethics” as such—to respond to the demand of an other that is not ontologizable and comes

from without. Without hunger, Dasein lacks a key empathetic “human” capacity which could put it in proximity with such a radical other in order to recognize its unforeseeable demand.

As Derrida points out in “Eating Well,” hunger is a fundamental component of biopolitics, as it “evokes a law of need *or* desire” (282). It thus complicates the very foundational political structure on which the multitude is organized. Hunger, says Derrida, is also fundamentally linked with the question of “who” is prior to the positing of the subject—a question related to the radical incalculability or undecidability of the subject that is a key concern of Derridian and Levinasian ethics and the basis of their refusal of ontology “as such.”

A moral imperative of “eating well,” Derrida suggests, is a foundational law related to the phallogocentric “sacrificial structure” organizing contemporary western politics, the State structure, and western morality. In *Glas*, Derrida refers to just such a Christian paradigm of subjection under Spirit as centred on “consum(mat)ing.” This operation, he says,

comes down to letting oneself be penetrated [...] and to establishing one’s identity. Jesus’ identifying penetration in his disciples—first John, the beloved disciple; the Father’s in Jesus and through him in his disciples—John first; subjective in a first time, then objective, becomes subjective by ingestion. Consum(mat)ing interiorizes, idealizes, relieves. (69)

My subjectivization under the Spirit of Christ—a founding western paradigm of biopolitical community—says Derrida, obtains in my letting myself be penetrated by Christ, a penetration that is at the same time a consumption (eating the body of

Christ and drinking wine, which is His blood) in a kind of metonymic ecstasy of pleasure and pain modeled after the last supper.

To link a kind of law of “eating well” with the phallogocentric organization of the dominant western institutions of global politics, law and the state, Derrida explains, “it suffices to take seriously the idealizing interiorization of the phallus and the necessity of its passage through the mouth, whether it’s a matter of words or of things, of sentences, of daily bread or wine, of the tongue, the lips, or the breast of the other” (“Eating Well,” 280). The phallus, in other words, is a dominant symbolic structure that is interiorized—or consumed—through language and ideas, but also as a kind of organizing western biopolitical law of consumption. It is not merely a law ordering who sits at the head of the table or who should eat first, but also about who should or shouldn’t be eaten—a key question residing at the very conceptual limits of the human and its sacrificial structure. Derrida says that “the metonymy of ‘eating well’ [*bien manger*] would always be the rule. The question is no longer one of knowing if it is ‘good’ to eat the other or if the other is ‘good’ to eat, nor of knowing which other. One eats him regardless and lets oneself be eaten by him” (282). In short, one *must* eat, but what are the laws and conceptual limits of this eating? *Who* eats (whom), and how is this “who” fundamentally constituted by the laws of eating well? This Christian symbolic sacrificial structure orders the biopolitical categorization of western human community, but also the animal, the plant, the mineral—all of which categories are elements of the human and help to delineate what constitutes

murder, sacrifice and consumption. The dominant neoliberal paradigm of globalization/Empire espouses an extreme, capitalistic version of this sacrificial logic, Empire being founded on an insatiable hunger for expansion *par excellence*, eating everything and everyone in its wake in order to reproduce itself in an unsustainable, auto-erotic cycle of what eventually becomes a suicidal, cannibalistic consumption of itself. Empire sacrifices everything—ultimately even Empire.

But is the multitude a viable antidote to Empire’s insatiable suicidal appetite?

The multitude—a utopic, totalizing political concept purportedly comprised of singularities in common—like Heideggerian Dasein, lacks the “human” capacity for hunger. The condition of possibility for being a subject of the multitude is the tacit submission to the law of *being against Empire* above all else—even eating. Moreover, the multitude is an ontological, politicized subject whose human “face” is clearly identifiable. It is thus unconcerned with that incalculable, indefinable alterity it is meant to substitute for as a global political identity—the universal “face” of (human) being against Empire. “Being against” is the antithesis of an empathetic “human” quality; it is the embodiment of an *exclusion* of the other via an internalization—or digestion—of all others within a particular, preconceived notion of *whom* that other really is. While the multitude is deeply concerned with the “hunger” of others—particularly “the poor”—for Levinas and Derrida, attending *first* to the demand emanating from the other’s

incalculable hunger is a sacred, seminal concern, limited only by the unforeseeable hunger of the third. The multitude, however, isn't capable of detecting a hunger/desire that is *otherwise than the being* of the multitude itself. This is a major problem, then, when we consider that the multitude's efficacy rests on the hypothesis that its particular over weaning desire to "be against" can be identified as a *universal* human desire immanent to the global totality of Empire.

Another problem with the multitude's idealization of the desire to be against Empire is that the subject of the multitude is *performative*. By this, I mean that its multiple, heterogeneous subjects can only imperfectly and singularly embody such a desire and are thus continually reinscribing anew the law of such a desire, possibly even to the exclusion of the concept of "being against." This is perhaps, in a certain way, Hardt and Negri's intention all along. On the one hand—in Levinasian terms—the multitude (if such a subject exists) *says* that it is a utopic, political concept that universally circumscribes a particular human hunger to free itself from Empire. This "saying" is most identifiable in the scholastic sections of Hardt and Negri's book at the ends of their chapters. On the other hand, their "two handed" methodology—one side of which they say is "deconstructive"—suggests that the *saying* of its utopic, political slogan "being against Empire" is radically contingent on the singular ways and locations in which this political slogan is said. The multitude is thus internally interrupted and transformed by all of its singular, performative utterances of which it is



comprised. These individual desires (maybe even for food) which performatively drive Empire, hope Hardt and Negri, will transform/destroy Empire—of which the multitude is an inextricable part—from within, if organized around the common ontological goal of being against. However, such a “being”—or *ontological* organization of political struggle—presupposes a kind of subjective “presencing” of the multitude which, in a certain way, gives too much credence to the supposed actual, material “existence”—as opposed to the very serious *effects*—of Empire. Levinas formulates this problematic thus:

We have been seeking the *otherwise than being* from the beginning, and as soon as it is conveyed before us it is betrayed in the said that dominates the saying which states it. [Yet,] everything shows itself at the price of this betrayal, even the unsayable. In this betrayal the indiscretion with regard to the unsayable, which is probably the very task of philosophy, becomes possible. (7)

While the singularity of the radical other is what Levinasian ethics opens itself to, he concedes that this irreducible demand can only be apprehended via its betrayal in the politicized, ontological form of the face. The unsayable is detectible in the saying of what is said—not in taking literally the said as dogma or law. The demand “I am hungry—can you spare something to eat?” comes close to a recognizably human utterance, taking into consideration the contingencies of language, translation, context, politics, the particular sovereign exception in effect which orders the limits of what counts as “human,” history, race, gender, class, age, to name but a few considerations. But what can possibly be meant by such a demand? The answer to this question is infinite and, for Derrida and Levinas, must remain in question. Yet, *asking* such a question—and being open to hearing

it as an irreducible demand—is the condition of possibility for any *singular* need for food to be fulfilled.

But what must be sacrificed in such an all consuming desire to be against Empire? Who, in other words, is consumed by such a desire and who left to starve as a consequence of focusing, above all, on “being against?”

If the multitude is open only to a universal demand to dismantle Empire, then its ontological formulation of human community is primarily based on exclusion. The multitude—by mourning *in advance* the sacrifice of humanity as the *exclusive* result of Empire’s voracious, suicidal consumption of the globe—in a sense cuts short—by ontologizing and consuming—the lives of those humans whose singular hungers are not identifiable via the multitude. By not responding to other singular hungers, the multitude thus denies them the sustenance they need to live on beyond the finitude of the human “face” of the multitude itself.

### *Ethics Otherwise than Bush*

The spectral remainders of Derrida’s critique of post-war globalization also haunt President Bush’s post-9/11 ethical rhetoric as a kind of spectral “thirdness,” or unforeseeable alterity interrupting Bush’s theocratic universalism. Bush’s celebrated “innovation” in the American political system is his claim, made during his November 2005 inaugural address, that “America’s vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one.” Later in this same speech, he fatefully forecasts that the “survival of liberty” in the U.S. “increasingly depends on the

success of liberty in other lands.”<sup>19</sup> The veracity of these vicarious claims hinges on their presupposition that “liberty,” American politics, and American morality are 1) so dialectically fluid as to be indelibly linked, and 2) supposedly universally applicable ethical ends in- and for-themselves that therefore *must* be globally deployed and defended, Empire-like, at any cost. A less obvious insight provided by Bush’s catastrophic cultural blindness is his demonstration in his 2005 inaugural address of the coextensive—not reflective or “Realist”<sup>20</sup>—relationship between the political and the ethical. Bush’s conflation of Wilsonian idealism (often referred to as “moralism”) and political realism rhetorically obfuscates those very plagues of globalization summarized by Derrida in *Specters of Marx* and exacerbated by 9/11. However, Bush’s “Wilsonian-realism” can be read in such a way that it makes Derrida’s Levinasian point about the coextensiveness of ethics and politics. For Derrida, in other words, ethics and politics subtend each other to the point of being inseparable, the one always eventually evoking the other on some level.

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<sup>19</sup> President Bush’s 2005 inaugural address.

<sup>20</sup> My concept of “Realism” here is meant hauntologically to invoke, among other possible spectral inflections of the term, both a political realist philosophy of “natural” state behaviourism, and a Lacanian-type concept of the “Real” which, for him, supposedly grounds an immanent, if obscured, symbolic order. The first usage, political realism, implies the existence of a “natural” operation of power outside the realm of moral or ethical concerns that is nonetheless part of “human nature.” As Hans J. Morgenthau explains in *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (1978), “Political realism believes that politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature. In order to improve society it is first necessary to understand the laws by which society lives” (4). Power is thus dependent, according to this perspective, upon the interventions of ethical actors to supplement and steer state sovereignty. The latter Lacanian concept of the “Real,” this, a psychoanalytic form of existential humanism holding that a “naturally” ethical individual finds him/herself symbolically “broken” by the very nature of political subjectivity. Ethical reconnection with the “Real” is thus necessary in order to “fix” one’s (morally dis-ordered) psychi. Nonetheless, for Lacan, the symbolic, while always imperfect, is anchored in transcendental Reality as its immanently reflective signifier.

Differently put, Bush's "innovation" serves as an example of the always indelibly political "face" of ethics and the ethical responsibilities and presuppositions always infrastructurally at play in any politics. For example, the "rightness" of Bush's "moral" decisions—i.e., his decision to invade Iraq based not on hard evidence but his "gut instincts"—quickly unravels when those same moral judgments run up against the finitude of their political playing-out. In other words, the interruption of unforeseeable, infinite "third" possibilities into the Bush administration's most clearly-laid plans guarantees that the reflective playing-out of absolute ethical ends (i.e. the "liberation" of Iraq and the global exportation of "Freedom") via prescribed political means (i.e. the ubiquitous war on terror, violent invasion and "regime change") is never foreseeable nor ever absolutely decidable as the "right thing to do."

Bush's "innovation" is viewed by many journalists and political analysts as a unique and revolutionary approach to U.S. political policymaking.<sup>21</sup> Of course, long before Bush, Ghandi once observed that those who fail to see the link between politics and religion understand neither. Unfortunately, as evidenced by the "ethically" disastrous War on Terror and the ways in which its rhetoric has, in the name of "Freedom," instead overwhelmingly fed fanaticism and state terrorism around the world, it seems clear that Bush's "innovation" failed, even

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<sup>21</sup> For a representative selection of commentaries on Bush's second inaugural address, see William Safire's *New York Times* article "Bush's 'Freedom Speech'" (Jan. 21, 2005), Fred Barnes's *The Weekly Standard* article "Bush's Breakthrough: The president's second inaugural address smashes the wall between the idealists and the realists" (Jan. 20, 2005), Peggy Noonan's *Wall Street Journal* editorial "Way Too Much God: Was the president's speech a case of 'misson

by its own ethical yardstick. In short, Bush's most insightful blindness, his interlinking of ethics and politics, unexpectedly hits the nail on the head while breathtakingly missing the entire "ethical" point.

*On the one hand*, the major problem with Bush's ethico-political "innovation" is what I call its evangelical "neo-Hegelian" idealism—a symptom of neoconservative triumphalism attributed by Derrida in *Specters of Marx* to Francis Fukuyama and his sublimation of globalization's cold-war "victory" over "communism." Like Fukuyama's post-cold-war rhetoric, Bush's post-9/11 ethical rhetoric lends a universalist and practically pantheistic fervor to his political policymaking, holding any separation of political realism and moralism as irrelevant due to their supposedly *reflective* relationship to each other. Such a theocratic "faith" in the rightness of his political objectives leads Bush, for instance, to view his own "gut instincts"<sup>22</sup> as guiding principles given him by God.

*On the other hand*, President Bush is absolutely right: American political realist strategies have never been separable from the "ethical" limits, presuppositions, and obligations performatively invoked by political "realist" decision-making. Wilsonian idealism and American political realism, as their various, heterogeneous specters have played out in U.S. politics, have always presupposed that the "greater good" is best served by steadfastly maintaining

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inebriation'?" (Jan. 21, 2005), and E. J. Dionne Jr.'s *Washington Post* article, "Visions in Need of a Little Realism" (Jan. 21, 2005).

“American values” at the cost of the “lesser evils” inherent in U.S. global domination. These lesser evils, of late, include illegal detentions, kidnappings, illegal military courts, torture, state-sanctioned assassinations, and the outright rescinding of human rights for particular individuals deemed outside the authorized discourse of humanity itself—in short, state terrorism, authorized by the highest levels of the Bush administration. Likewise, the ethical limits and obligations presupposed by Bush to be *universal*—even *theological truths*—are nonetheless thoroughly “political.” For as Jacques Derrida points out in his essay “Ethics and Politics Today” in *Negotiations*, “ethical problems are already taken up in the so-called space of the political, of calculation, of negotiation, of deliberation” (302), as well as by having, at some point, to bracket deliberation in the urgent, “mad” moment of ethico-political “decision.” As if such “decisions” were ever ultimately, definitively decidable!

Bush’s constant invocations of universal theological moral values, however, seek precisely to 1) invoke just such a dogmatic decidability in global politics, and 2) instill in his administration the de facto sovereign exceptionalist authority to decide. In a sense, this is what late-globalization/Empire provides: a practically totalizing worldview and globalized context into which everything and everyone is interpellated as its subjects, and thus is subject to its “ethics.” Empire thus normativizes its own particular biopolitical paradigm of humanity itself—

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<sup>22</sup> For evidence of Bush’s belief in the divine rightness of his own beliefs in his own words, see interview material with President Bush in Bob Woodward’s book *Bush At War* (2002), particularly page 131.

what constitutes a “livable life” vs. what Giorgio Agamben has described as exterminatable, politically irrelevant “bare life”—as a residual effect. It thus seems more urgent than ever, in the post-9/11 period of perpetual war against “Evil” as narrowly defined by a hegemonic U.S. sovereign exception, to historicize, complicate, and *exorc-analyze* the “event(ness)” of 9/11, for example, as a specter not only of Empire, but of a longer, ongoing western globalization of “the world” under a totalizing capitalist paradigm. Such a historicization of globalization, as an unfolding *hauntology* whose specters never left us but live on in ever more monstrous, mutated forms, is modeled in Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*.

### *Hauntology*

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida manages his quasi-utopic critique of globalization, internationalism and in their wakes his reconsideration of Karl Marx’s legacy, via his neologism “hauntology.” Hauntology works both as a complexification and as a Specter of historicity. “Haunting is historical, to be sure” suggests Derrida, “but it is not *dated*, it is never docilely given a date in the chain of presents, day after day, according to the instituted order of a calendar” (4). Any periodization, or “ontologizing” of historical “progress,” in other words, is revealed under a hauntological critique to be contingently “spectral” and open to—in fact constituted by—many singular and transformative Specters of its own history. Hauntology is also a thinking of ethics – a characteristically Levinasian

one – that focuses on the limits of its infrastructural “ground,” contextual contingencies, as well as on the “eventness” underlying historical events which constitute the “evidence” upon which ethical decisions are based. From a “hauntological” perspective, ethics and politics approach each other to the point of near coextensivity—the one always referring in irreducible ways to the other as its orienting object. But hauntology is most obviously about the work of mourning, the ethics and politics of memorialization, and the re-membering of historical “ghosts.”

Borrowing his spectral thematics from the first lines of Marx and Engle’s *Communist Manifesto*,<sup>23</sup> Derrida describes his concept of hauntology in *Specters of Marx* as

repetition *and* the first time: this is perhaps the question of the event as question of the ghost. *What* is a ghost? What is the *effectivity* or the *presence* of a specter, that is, of what seems to remain as ineffective, virtual, insubstantial as a simulacrum? Is there *there*, between the thing itself and its simulacrum, an opposition that holds up? Repetition *and* the first time, but also a *last time*. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time. Altogether other. Staging for the end of history. Let us call it a *hauntology* (10)

The first question raised here is “what” is a ghost? Is it a simulacrum (in Platonic terms, an imperfectly reflected other to a perfect origin)? Is it a first time, a last time, or both? However, the “ontological” questions surrounding the “event” viewed as ghost quickly shifts to such urgent, pressing questions as: 1) what are

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<sup>23</sup> “A Specter is haunting Europe — the Specter of communism. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this Specter: Pope and Tsar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police-spies” (Marx and Engels. *The Communist Manifesto* 1).



the *effects* of such a ghost? 2) How does such a seemingly benign, “simulacral” specter possess such effective political force? And 3) By whom, for whom, and in whose interests is such spectral force put into service? The stakes of haunting are high—precisely, it is a life and death negotiation. Marx makes this clear in his *Eighteenth Brumaire of Napoleon Bonaparte*, where he writes that

the tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something entirely new, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle slogans and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language. (595)

But what are the conditions of such a haunting? Repetition *and* a first time; such is the aporia of “history” as open-ended question. For Derrida, history is always *in question*, or it is not really historical but “spiritual” and secretly located somewhere outside itself. And where there are secrets, there are always secret economies of power at work. Hauntology thus attempts to accommodate the openness of historical events, which are always irreducibly contingent upon their multiple, heterogeneous spectral effects and interpretations. On the other hand, hauntology takes seriously the life and death stakes of rigorously, slowly doing “justice”<sup>24</sup> to those historical specters. Such specters, after all, are the very conditions of possibility for history bereft of ontologizable origins and/or localizable remains.

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<sup>24</sup> Justice here circumscribes a Derridian aporia comprised, in French, of *justesse* and *juste*, or a “soundness and rigor” in opposition to, yet enabled by its own irreducible, dogmatic “law.”

Hauntology, explains Simon Critchley in his book *Ethics, Politics,*

*Subjectivity*, takes the classic form of a Derridian homonym,

namely the difference [in French] between ontologie and hantologie, a difference that can only be marked grammatologically in writing, that bypasses phoneticization [...] [Derrida claims early on in *Specters of Marx* that] this hantologie is not only more powerful and ample than any ontology or thinking of Being, i.e. Heidegger's, but contains within it, as a secondary effect, any eschatology or teleology linked to such ontology [...] [Thus,] ontologie is an apocalyptic discourse on or of the end, whereas hantologie is a discourse on the end of the end. (146)

The condition of possibility for a hauntological “Spirit” to *live on*, in other words, is that its “being” is irreducibly and infinitely spread out amongst its supplemental traces, or specters. Hauntology, as Critchley describes it here, is responding directly to a closure (or “end”) of history evoked by Fukuyama's neoconservative triumphalist hailing of the fall of communism and its immanent, permanent displacement by a totalizing global reign of capitalism. From this perspective, hauntology does much the same job that Marx's critique of Hegel did: it takes a universalizing discourse marking the end of history, and points out its finitudinal limits—the *end of the end*—by focusing on the alienating spectral qualities of Hegel's universal categories of being. For Marx, lives are not a priori categorizable in idealist terms to the extent that existence *precedes* essence. Derrida takes such a critique much further, suggesting that the closure of those Hegelian categories—as reflections of Spiritual truths or essences—is thrown into question as a result of the excesses and contradictions in the spectral, or “spherical” organization of those Spiritual knowledges about human being. Unlike Hegel or Marx, however, for Derrida the concept of human life is

*fundamentally* spectral. The “lives” of specters—organized, for Hegel, most properly by the family around ontological categories of birth, death, dates, names, and the precise history and location of remains—for Derrida, can be understood to exceed their normative eschatological organization and *live on* in multiple, heterogeneous, and ultimately indefinable spectral forms.

Hauntology achieves its aporetic (or irreducibly contradicted) concept of historiography by setting up a dualism within itself. This aporia is represented in *Specters of Marx* as the “Spirit” of a thing vs. its multiple, heterogeneous “spectral” forms. These specters are the supplements, or “traces,” of a concept which are the Spirit’s very conditions of possibility. Derrida explains that

what distinguishes the specter or the *revenant* from the *spirit*, including the spirit in the sense of the ghost in general, is doubtless a super-natural and paradoxical phenomenality, the furtive and ungraspable visibility of the invisible, or an invisibility of a visible X, that *non-sensuous sensuous* of which *Capital* speaks (we will come to this) with regard to a certain exchange-value; it is also, no doubt, the tangible intangibility of a proper body without flesh, but still the body of someone as someone *other*. And of someone *other* that we will not hasten to determine as self, subject, person, consciousness, spirit, and so forth. This already suffices to distinguish the specter not only from the icon or the idol but also from the image of the image, from the Platonic *phantasma*, as well as from the simple *simulacrum* of something in general to which it is nevertheless so close and with which it shares, in other respects, more than one feature.  
(7)

Like Platonic simulacra which always imperfectly refer to a unified, ungraspable ideal, specters, Derrida repeatedly warns, are always *more than one* and they are *heterogeneous* (if even such a unified “heterogeneity” of the specter can be risked). These same specters, however, implicitly demonstrate that the transcendental signified “*spirits*” to which they refer (for example, Hegel’s

concept of absolute Spirit) are in fact non-existent, without “origins,” and thus not “present”—it is only through the “traces” of such spirits that we receive their memory. Thus, specters, if they are to do justice to their particular concepts, for Derrida, must always point *beyond* the eschatological limits (meaning the confines of a life ontologized as dates of birth and death and labeled with a proper name and hypostatized attributes) of their own finitude.

The periodizing force of globalization—its westernizing spectral effect of ethico-political universalization of the whole world which has accelerated in the post-9/11 period of Empire—is a kind of infrastructural logic of *control*.

Derrida’s concept of hauntology usefully unpacks this globalizing logic in terms of the *helmet* and *visor effects*. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida explains that

to feel ourselves seen by a look which it will always be impossible to cross, that is the *visor effect* on the basis of which we inherit from the law. Since we do not see the one who sees us, and who makes the law, who delivers the injunction (which is, moreover, a contradictory injunction), since we do not see the one who orders ‘swear,’ we cannot identify it in all certainty, we must fall back on its voice. [...] An essentially blind submission to his secret, to the secret of his origin: this is a first obedience to the injunction. It will condition all the others. (7)

The visor effect is described here in terms similar to those of the secretive surveillance techniques of the guard hidden behind the slats of the central security window in Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon, a model of incarceration made infamous by Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*. However, in Derrida’s version, the ghostly voice of the law positions itself behind an early-modern style visor brimming with sedimented historical resonances. In this way, Derrida (like Heidegger does with Husserlian phenomenology) “poeticizes” Foucauldian

power, underlining its spectral qualities. In the particular context of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Derrida underlines its specifically western Specter of power, the aesthetics of its "historicity," its discursive infrastructures, and the "techne"<sup>25</sup> of its disciplinary techniques, all of which are performatively reinaugurate power's "Spirit" anew via its multiple, heterogeneous, singular spectral effects. This particular context, however, serves as an occasion for working through the subtleties of such ethico-political engagements with historical inheritance, and to understand how the past is often not dated at all.

*The Specters of Shakespeare Haunting Hardt, Negri, Derrida, and Bush*

In Derrida's visor effect, the inheritor to this ancient, incalculably sedimented systematicity of surveillance ("power") has only the mediation of the "voice" behind the mask for evidence of "authority" and/or "authenticity." Above all, the voice commands its interpellated subject to *obey*—"Swear!" The poetics of Derrida's visor and helmet effects is derived, in part, from Marx's own favorite playwright, Shakespeare. *Specters of Marx* in fact opens with a scene from *Hamlet* in which the younger Hamlet is confronted with the burden of inheriting his father's monarchic legacy. "Swear!" commands King Hamlet to his son and spectral double. Hamlet Sr.'s performative command "Swear" thus evokes an Oedipal inheritance, or "swearing in" of Hamlet Jr. to his father's monarchic inheritance, and a truth-telling thrice removed. First of all, this is because Hamlet

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<sup>25</sup> Heidegger's term for the poetics of "bringing forth" an idea or concept, for example, in the form

Jr. must “swear” in the name of his father to the truth of his father’s story; second, because King Hamlet is a specter; and finally, because the “truth” he is passing on finds its condition of possibility in the linguistic and contextual finitude of its utterance (a “mediation” that is thus already the supplemental “stuff” of its “content”). The mediating power-dynamic of the oedipal exchange, with its hidden economies of power and tradition, is underscored by Hamlet Jr.’s hesitation to simply accept and swear, illuminating this economic exchange to be far from a simple, “reflective” transfer of inheritance. Yet another complication here is the “thirdness”—that unknowable, radical alterity mediating this already thrice removed exchange—which exponentially multiplies its “thrice” removal. The interruption of the third multiplies the distance mediating this oedipal inheritance, revealing it to be an *infinite*, unbridgeable abyss at the edge of which Hamlet Jr.’s unhappy consciousness teeters on oblivion. In short, every aspect of this exchange of memory and tradition is haunted by hidden contingencies and irreducible complexity. For Hamlet, this makes the ethical choice of accepting or rejecting his inheritance and impossible dilemma. However, his spectral inheritance also proves to be *inescapable*; in fact, the very inauguration of Hamlet’s subjectivity depends on it. He *is* his father’s son. This changes his options: No longer is it simply a question of asserting his “individual agency” by accepting or rejecting his inheritance after “great argument” (Shakespeare *Hamlet* IV.iv.54), as his very “individuality” itself is coextensively inaugurated by such a

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of a “science.”

subject-forming Oedipal inheritance. Thus, the choice instead becomes whether “*to be, or not to be.*” Death, for Hamlet, seems like the only escape from the subjectifying power-dynamics of inheritance. Yet, even with “death”—perhaps *particularly* with the eschatological finitude and politics of death, says Hegel—the burdens of subjectification and inheritance are *still* inevitable. The ghost of Hamlet Sr. is an “embodiment” of the ways in which this burden of inheritance is not allowed an eschatological statute of limitations.

By the end of the play, Hamlet is doomed to repeat, *almost* to the last detail, the fate of his father. In fact, a careful reading of those last pages suggests that all of the deaths in the final scenes of *Hamlet* follow an almost prescribed pattern repeating previous “historical events” in the play itself.<sup>26</sup> The type of

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<sup>26</sup> In the last violent moments of Shakespeare’s play, Hamlet is suddenly forced, after “great argument,” urgently into action as history insists itself upon him. The hauntological “doubleness” that characterizes almost every scene in the play is especially prominent in this one, as each death seems also to represent a kind of simulacral repetition of—or retaliation for—a previous historical death. Claudius, for example, is killed with poison by young Hamlet who, at the instant of Claudius’s demise, becomes King Hamlet in full war gear. Hamlet, now the simulacral “substitute” for his father, thereby transforms himself into the vengeful vessel of King Hamlet’s Ghost, who exacts “eye-for-eye” revenge against his murderous brother. Laertes, like his father, dies an unwitting pawn of the king, but by Hamlet’s sword (which should have been King Claudius’s, it having been switched at the last moment before the poisoned sword could be given to Laertes). Gertrude is also killed by poison at the hand of Claudius, a coincidence that likewise resonates as an historical repetition of the murder of his brother. This strange hauntological logic of Gertrude’s death is illuminated by young Hamlet who, bidding her farewell at the end of act 4.3, addresses his mother as *King Hamlet*. His reasoning is that

Father and mother is man and wife, man  
and wife is one flesh, and so my mother. (4.3.53-4)

Thus, the vicious cycle of violence circles back to Claudius, who uncannily re-kills Hamlet Sr. by killing the son (a simulacral “substitute” for his father King Hamlet), and thus also kills Gertrude, his own wife, by mistake, but also as a consequence of her being a part of both Hamlets—the mother of one, and the wife, and thus by renaissance standards, literally the corporal being of the husband. The tenuous separation, or “subtension,” between an “individual’s” corporeality vs. their “subjective” hauntological inheritance, or their “ontological” vs. “hauntological” being, thus momentarily blurs here for Shakespeare, very much along the lines of Derridian “hauntology.” But at this point in the action, the *singularity* of young Hamlet’s performative simulation of his father’s ghost asserts itself as an interruption, or “flaw” into the forceful hegemonic ethico-

slow, careful reading of the last scenes of *Hamlet* which I undertake in footnote 24 is meant to model the type of “justice” (or “great argument”) required of such a complex ethico-political narrative as Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. However, such a rigorous critical engagement is precisely *avoided* by the republican Right’s invocation, after 9/11, of Hamlet as an exemplary ditherer in the face of destiny—a calculated, instrumentalized thoughtlessness to which I will return in a moment.

Thus, Shakespeare offers a model of ethico-political inheritance in *Hamlet* which strongly resonates with Marx’s *Eighteenth Brumaire* in its feeling of inevitability, yet offers a kind of hopeful ethics of intervention after “great argument.” Though the son is not able to *escape* his father’s historical inheritance, Hamlet’s rigorous, relentless “argument” with his father’s voice behind the mask leads the son to “ethically” intervene in the “just” playing out of the possible future(s) to come of his father’s legacy in the final moments of the play. This ethics of great argument, while fully embracing the “political face” of inheritance and responsibility, if not a preconceived notion of the other’s “Spirit,” is in direct contradiction with an idea of ethics as direct inheritance of absolute morality received, like Bush says of his “gut instincts,” without thought or question from an omniscient Spirit.

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political legacy that has *insisted* itself upon him as a seeming “substitution.” Fortinbras appearance at the end of this scene entwines these deaths even more deeply with the “barbary” of the national historical record. King Hamlet’s expansion of Denmark’s borders through the killing of King Fortinbras of Norway, however, is suddenly set “right again” when Hamlet *intervenes* in the playing out of his father’s insistent historical legacy by lending young Fortinbras his “dying voice” (5.2.298) in support of his succession to the elective monarchy of Denmark, thereby ending the border dispute between the two countries.



Complexifying his spectralization of “power-dynamics” while characteristically confining his critique to the particular “textual example” of Hamlet’s armour, Derrida examines another hauntological effect of power that he sees closely related to that of the visor. This, he explains, is the *helmet effect*, for which

it suffices that a visor be *possible* and that one play with it. Even when it is raised, *in fact*, its possibility continues to signify that someone, beneath the armor, can safely see without being seen or without being identified. Even when it is raised, the visor remains, an available resource and structure, solid and stable as armor, the armor that covers the body from head to foot, the armor of which it is a part and to which it is attached. This is what distinguishes a visor from the mask with which, nevertheless, it shares this incomparable power, perhaps the supreme insignia of power: the power to see without being seen. The helmet effect is not suspended when the visor is raised. Its power, namely its possibility, is in that case recalled merely in a more intensely dramatic fashion. (8)

With the onset of “Empire,” the visor effect seems to have become less mediatized and more “immediate,” virtual, and biopolitically fluid. The wider infrastructural armour of late-globalization/Empire—its helmet effect—on the other hand, remains historically rooted in that same neoconservative triumphalist discourse by and for whom and in whose interests the armour was put in place. Even when one sees the seeming solidity of Hamlet’s face, Derrida suggests, the mere *possibility* of panoptic protective gear prevails as the dominant power-dynamic. Even the *threat* of the visor vitiates the need for it to be made visible to evoke the helmet’s ideological effects of control. This, I think, is a key aspect of how the infrastructures of globalization/Empire hauntologically *mediate* and/or *underwrite* the Bush administration’s post-9/11 ethical rhetoric as its symptomatic

instrument. While Bush's rhetoric *seems* to represent the sovereign exceptionalist authority of American hegemony over global politics, its underlying armour, or enabling "force-of-law," is inextricably linked with the infrastructural helmet-effects of Empire. The hidden, yet omnipresent specter of globalization/Empire means that Bush's rhetoric need only *refer* to its universalizing principles—such as the priority of the market as "naturally" encouraging democratic principles; or the assumed necessity of globally exporting "Freedom" abroad, which hauntologically invokes the globalization of freedom via free market economics—in order to invoke its all-subsuming power-dynamics. Further, the largely capitalist forces backing the president's proclamations—Halliburton Corporation's scandalous operations in Iraq, global telecommunications and technological infrastructures, the burgeoning U.S. debt—all point to the overweening priorities of oil and neo-capitalist influence which contradict the "faces" of freedom and democracy invoked to manufacture consent for the war on terror.

For, even when the visor is raised, the "face" is itself but a spectral effect haunted by incalculable historical inheritances and infinite, irreducible "thirdness." In Levinasian terms, it is both inadequate to and radically exceeds its own political visage. This irreducibility of the face obliterates the possibility of expressing simple political identity or absolute ethical intentions in such a face-to-face encounter as, for example, watching one of President Bush's speeches. The apparent non-existence of supposed stores of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, however, unexpectedly interrupted Bush's ethico-political discourse. But this

interruption cannot be reduced to the mere exposure of political “conspiracy.” Hamlet and George Bush (if only this were a more apt comparison!) can never be certain whether or not the “spirits” delivering them spectral “evidence,” or even their “gut instincts,” are telling them the truth or lying. Were those spectral interests surrounding and influencing Bush pushing for an invasion of Iraq irregardless of the “evidence” of WMDs, interests that included the pursuit of oil profits and war contracts? Halliburton Corporation’s proximity to the presidency cannot be ignored in weighing the politics of such a spectral inheritance. However, speculation aside, there is no denying the *forceful effects* of these powerful specters on their inheritors, and the *irresponsibility* (as opposed to sound, slow, rigorous, and just deliberation) with which such an inheritance was mishandled by Bush in the case of Iraq.

And yet, a very different specter of *Hamlet* is invoked by the Bush administration in its post-9/11 ethical rhetoric. Not long after September 11, 2001, a declaration circulated in the U.S. media that in response to the terrorist attacks, America would not be “the Hamlet of Nations.” This declaration, though not directly attributable to the Bush administration, evokes George Schultz’s infamous 1984 comments on which President Bush’s doctrine of prevention (“The Bush Doctrine”) is obviously based.<sup>27</sup> To dismiss Hamlet as a ditherer in the face

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<sup>27</sup> In 1984, then U.S. Secretary of State George Schultz pushed a policy of “defense through appropriate ‘preventive or preemptive actions’ against terrorists before they strike” which stated that “we cannot allow ourselves to become the Hamlet of nations, worrying endlessly over whether and how to respond. A great nation with global responsibilities cannot afford to be hamstrung by confusion and indecisiveness. Fighting terrorism will not be a clean or pleasant contest, but we have no choice. . . . We must reach a consensus in this country that our responses

of destiny is difficult to support after carefully parsing the play, as I think my reading makes clear. *Hamlet* also underlines the ways in which the Bush doctrine, as a kind of specter of Hamlet's moral dilemma, is difficult to justify unless the U.S. allows itself the absolute moral authority to judge an Other's intentions without clear evidence or provocation, as it did against Iraq. Hamlet could never be accused of such rash ethical absolutism, and after much soul-searching and "great argument," he did the best possible thing.

For Bush, however, the world is too simple to require a "great argument." Indeed, in his view, wasting time arguing with or over the other instead of acting offers a dangerous invitation to terrorists and potential mushroom clouds. For Bush, the globe is governed by universal human values and absolute moral principles strikingly resonant with what Hardt and Negri describe as the "nearly" totalizing ethico-political paradigm of Empire. Even if Empire cannot be reduced to the hegemonic reign of any particular nation or group, this ready infrastructure of biopolitical "control" perhaps serves as the "Spirit" to which Bush, knowingly or not, owes his inheritance of universal values. These utopic values reverberate

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should go beyond passive defense to consider means of active prevention, preemption, and retaliation. Our goal must be to prevent and deter future terrorist's acts. . . . The public must understand *before the fact* that occasions will come when their government must act before each and every fact is known and the decisions cannot be tied to the polls" (George Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* [New York: Scribner's, 1993], 647). Shultz himself rehashed his "Hamlet of nations" quote a year after September 11, 2001 in a speech urging the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq. "The Bush Doctrine" basically follows the premise that the U.S. should strike first if it perceives an "immanent threat" to its people or sovereignty, instead of waiting to be provoked. The most famous defense of this doctrine was articulated by Condoleezza Rice, who invoked the possibility of a nuclear terrorist attack, warning that if the U.S. did not act preventatively, the "smoking-gun might be a mushroom cloud."

in Bush's 2005 inaugural address as the "pastoral calm" evoking Fukuyama's idealist notion of globalization as the "end of history."

Hardt and Negri, however, would argue that our contemporary spectral inheritance of globalization far surpasses the "national" *geopolitical* and ideological sovereign exceptionalism of "America" as such. In fact, the "nation-state," for them, is now nothing more than an instrumentalized node in the nebulous network structures of Empire. This contradicts Bush's construction of America as *itself* being a hegemonic, sovereign entity divinely endowed with the power to police the whole world. However, Empire can be understood to mediate and in fact "prop up" such an American exceptionalist perspective as Bush's. For 9/11 clearly acts as a kind of "visor effect" which is constantly "rattled" and evoked as an "ethical alibi" for Bush. This constant raising and lowering of the visor of 9/11 works as a political "smoke screen" hiding in plain sight the conflicted, aporetic "face" of the war on terror and its larger paradigmatic "helmet effect" of Empire's world-domination. The Bush administration's myopic focus on its own "visor rattling" thus tends to obfuscate the ways in which "America" isn't so much subject to a God-given set of moral values and "human" freedoms, but instead has itself become instrumentalized as part of Empire's wider armour to spread neo-capitalist values to the far corners of the globe. It remains to be seen, however, if, like Hamlet in his final act, America is able, after a "great argument," to more "justly" intervene in globalization's suicidal "progress" than Bush has with his "war on terror."

*The Haunted “Eventness” of Empire*

My basic thesis is that a clearer “look forward” requires a more rigorous “look back.” Such a backward glance involves assessing how the historical “event” of 9/11, as a symptomatic specter of Empire, is haunted by those earlier exemplary events in the dubious “progress” of globalization/Empire. How do these events spectrally evoke one another, for example, when the memory of one is ontologized, dated, and put into service for managing and policing the memory of the other?

One key event in the history of globalization/Empire taken up in *Specters of Marx* is the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. That event sparked the specious speculations that “Marxism,” finally overcome by capitalism, was dead. The fetishization of this event as capitalist neoconservative fantasy, a version forcefully argued for by Francis Fukuyama in his book *The End of History and the Last Man*, compelled Derrida to write *Specters of Marx* in the defense of Marxism(s). By contrast, the historical context of Hardt and Negri’s *Empire* is roughly circumscribed by the coming-to-fruit in the late-1990s of neoconservative-style globalization as *the* dominant global ethico-political paradigm with little competition and no practical “outside.”

Pre-dating *Empire*’s almost “hyper-real” example of the WTO protest, the fall of the Berlin wall signaled the shift from a pre-cold war bifurcation of communist and capitalist worldviews, to the post-cold war “immanence” of late-

capitalism as *global* paradigm. Unlike the supra-national character of the WTO protest, the fall of the Berlin wall conjures up *national* and *trans-national* concerns: The Union of Soviet *states* in its singular, finite form at the time, was seen by many neo-liberals as a microcosmic symbol of *all* communist and Marxist thought which, it was supposed by some, was succumbing to an imminent, globally-enveloping second-coming of capitalism. The main proponent and most dominant economic force behind neo-capitalist, neo-liberal globalization at the time was, and still remains, the United *States*. Jacques Derrida's thinking of globalization is thoroughly imbricated with what was, in that historical moment, the dominant discourse of globalization as inter-*nationalism* and trans-*national* financialization. After reading *Empire* and *Multitude*, however, it is unclear to me how we are *not* living daily with those specters of Internationalism that Derrida was talking about, nor how the so-called "new" context of Empire is *not* itself a kind of spirit comprised of such Specters, if existing in different and in many ways intensified forms of global interconnectedness. This is in fact one of the deceptive aspects of the claim that the world "changed" after 9/11. Such a view tends to obscure the ways in which 9/11 is deeply connected with, in fact is in a certain way a symptom of, the global Empire of neoliberal ethico-political values so celebrated after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Bush rhetorically exorc-analyses the fall of the Berlin wall in his 2005

Inaugural address, dubbed his "Freedom Speech:"

For a half century, America defended our own freedom by standing watch on distant borders. After the shipwreck of communism came years of

relative quiet, years of repose, years of sabbatical—and then there came a day of fire.

We have seen our vulnerability—and we have seen its deepest source. For as long as whole regions of the world simmer in resentment and tyranny—prone to ideologies that feed hatred and excuse murder—violence will gather, and multiply in destructive power, and cross the most defended borders, and raise a mortal threat. There is only one force of history that can break the reign of hatred and resentment, and expose the pretensions of tyrants, and reward the hopes of the decent and tolerant, and that is the force of human freedom.<sup>28</sup>

Here, Bush holds up communism—*all* communism—and “terrorism” to be one and the same regime of “hatred, murder, resentment.” He infers that these two sides of the same coin collectively represent a kind of gathering storm posing a “mortal threat” to “human freedom,” meaning western ideology. Almost mirroring Hegel, Bush constructs a universalized, yet ideologically homogenous and ethno-centric concept of human freedom to be *the* teleological end of history in and of itself; *the* good opposed to evil. Further, Bush constructs a continuous historical line directly connecting the fall of the Berlin wall (symbolizing the shipwreck of communist evil) and 9/11 (its apocalyptic resurrection in the form of terrorist evil). As blatantly and transparently propagandistic as this passage is, it is intriguing to note how it refers to a period of calm repose, specifically constructed as a “sabbatical” of capitalist dominance. On one level, this is a clear dismissal of the specter of Marxist academicism—the greatest critique of capitalism ever undertaken. On another level, however, it is clearly a veiled threat against those who might “think” too much in a time of terror. Thinking, after all,

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<sup>28</sup> President Bush’s 2005 Inaugural address.



tends to have the effect of blurring the clean, clear lines between terrorism and global capitalist Empire as a monumental struggle between good and evil, an illusion so necessary to the smooth running of a war. A similar ideological battle against “communism” was put into service to focus the hearts and minds of soldiers sent to Vietnam, a quagmire of political complexity and, at best, moral ambiguity. Bush’s speech, here, attempts to resurrect this very universalized mor(t)al threat against “human freedom” itself by drawing upon that earlier rhetoric of anti-communism, and connecting it directly with “terror,” an equally ubiquitous, equally intangible threat. Such a universalizing ethical rhetoric thus visors, in plain sight, the ways in which “human freedom” can instead refer, for example, to the debt slavery imposed upon poor, yet resource-rich countries all over the world by capitalist Empire (for example, through Royal-Dutch Shell’s activities in Nigeria, or in the form of those countless structural-adjustment programs enforced on mainly Third World countries by the International Monetary Fund discussed by Joseph Stiglitz in *Globalization and its Discontents*). It is thus only by painting a picture of the world in such bold, binaristic colours that such a capitalist fantasy can sustain the illusion of its being a) good for any but a handful of humans, and b) really a form of freedom.

### *Empire and the Battle of Seattle*

Hardt and Negri argue that since the dust settled after the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Empire has overtaken any opposition, and now immanently

is. The most exemplary historical event to symbolize the “immanence” of Empire, at least at the time they wrote their book, is the 1999 WTO protest in Seattle, Washington. More than any other example up to that time of a meeting of the “multitude”—Hardt and Negri’s strategically utopic term for contemporary political organization against Empire—the WTO protest encompassed a wide diversity of participants whose “singularities in-common” (*Multitude* 99) comprised an irreducible range of affiliations and post-national characteristics. The protest unfolded not only within the cordoned confines of the streets of Seattle, but as a virtual, hyper-real globalized “event” via the multitudinous handcams and media coverage that, as much as the protesters and participants themselves, were simultaneously creating and re-creating the event—over and over and over again—in the deterritorialized spaces of the internet, satellites and TV screens.

For Hardt and Negri, there are many indelible ways in which “we”—meaning every “one” in the world—are Empire. What exactly is meant by this “we,” and how precisely this “we” defines each one represented within it, however, are problematics left irreducibly in play in their critique. In a sense, these ontological aporias define the very democratic impulse, or will to “singularity-in-common,” driving their project. For them, getting past Empire, therefore, means also changing *ourselves*. In part, this means being open and adaptable to the “best” that Empire has to offer and rejecting its “worst” qualities. In particular, the “worst” means those plagues to which Derrida refers in *Specters*

of *Marx* that still haunt Empire from within and blatantly contradict its own democratic promise as a globalization or harmonization of “humanity.” The multitude, in short, represents a kind of performative structural adjustment of Empire itself, to the point of making it unrecognizable to itself.

Perhaps the appeal of *Empire* and *Multitude*, at least initially, is that after a long, embattled post-Cold-War period for the Leftist movement, Hardt and Negri have taken up the totalizing tools of neo-capitalism in order to beat it at its own game. Such a strategy was attempted less successfully by Ernesto Laclau and Chantale Mouffe in their Gramscian-inspired *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. Hardt and Negri’s outwardly ontological, provocatively moralistic, yet critically self-reflexive project more successfully tapped into the “spirit of the times,” serving simultaneously as a kind of reinvention of the Communist Manifesto and as an impressive redrawing of the “turbocapitalist” playing field of late-globalization/Empire.

The participants in the WTO protest in Seattle—those in the geopolitical space and time of the protest “proper,” as well as those participating all over the world via the virtual, deterritorialized environments of mediatization—came together in well-organized, ad-hoc, temporary network structures that delineated themselves along no clear national or international lines and in relation to no single hegemonic sovereign centers of control. Instead, this protest proceeded under the collective banner of *being against* what was evidently perceived by most protesters to be a hegemonic, homogenizing threat inherent in a neoliberal

ideological system of globalization/Empire, as metonymized in the World Trade Organization. This was by most accounts a successful mass political action drawing together multitudinous desires and diverse singularities under the common banner of *en masse ethical* rejection of the global *political* system's near carte-blanche support of neoliberal global financialization. The protester's larger organizing principle was that the WTO excludes most people both from globalization's bottom-line and from participation in its world-reaching decision making process. Nonetheless, the WTO's decisions on global issues have immanent ethico-political effects for the very shape of humanity and those humanities to come. Given the stakes of such a closed-session debate on the possible futures of humanity, it seems almost inconceivable that such a protest would *not* take place. But that was before 9/11...

### *Post-9/11 Empire*

Arguably, one of the most serious consequences of 9/11 and the subsequent "war on terror" is the way in which they have served as alibis for rolling back, and even rescinding human rights and freedoms. These include the right to launch the kind of protest undertaken at the "Battle of Seattle," a protest whose "security" risks, at least under the present Bush administration, would almost certainly have constituted a "terror threat" leading to mass arrests and violent reprisals under the aegis of "homeland security." Such state controls and censorship are now common-place, but would have been less comprehensible in

the late 1990s. This has amounted to a globalized invocation of near “martial law” on those loosely defined as being against us(/U.S.). Bush’s language of “for and against,” “good vs. evil,” is in fact chillingly evocative of Hardt and Negri’s own project of “being *against*.” After 9/11, being against could be construed as an act of terrorism by default. Such an unsympathetic reading of Antonio Negri’s work has already caused him to spend much of his life in an Italian prison for “terrorism.”

Joseph E. Stiglitz, Nobel prize-winning economist, is still optimistic about the influence of the protest movement. He points out in his influential book *Globalization and its Discontents* (2003), that

the protests at the Seattle meeting of the World Trade Organization in 1999 were a shock. Since then, the movement has grown stronger and the fury has spread. Virtually every major meeting of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization is now the scene of conflict and turmoil. The death of a protester in Genoa in 2001 was just the beginning of what may be many more casualties in the war against globalization. (3)

Stiglitz also provocates in this same book that

the barbaric attacks of September 11, 2001, have brought home with great force that we all share a single planet. We are a global community, and like all communities have to follow some rules so that we can live together. These rules must be—and must be seen to be—fair and just, must pay due attention to the poor as well as the powerful, must reflect a basic sense of decency and social justice. (xv)

Stiglitz implies that such rules in “today’s world” *must* adhere with the basic tenets of liberal democracy and Western concepts of social “justice.” His presupposition here is that globalization clearly “won,” at least for the foreseeable future, and so we *must* do it more “ethically,” meaning “liberally.” Another

aspect of his warning, however, is that these same western liberal democracies, particularly the U.S., who have led the charge to globalization, have by-and-large not lived up even to their own ethico-political promises, let alone been hospitable to radically other opinions about global governance. The result, says Stiglitz, is that “left with no alternatives, no way to express their concern, to press for change, people riot” (20). Are some of them thus understandably driven to commit terrorism? Stiglitz leaves this moral judgment up to his readers.

On the other hand, critics such as Noam Chomsky, Derrida, Hardt and Negri make a much less ambiguous connection between “terrorism” and globalization’s “suicidal autoimmune disorder.” This is not to say that any of them condone terrorism—the opposite is the case. However, if the current spear-carriers of globalization, including the U.S., are, according to Noam Chomsky, a *source* of terrorism,<sup>29</sup> then this presents a huge conflict of interest. How can globalization be seen as an altruistic ethico-political paradigm “naturally” spreading freedom and democracy if its most important adherents are guilty of international state-terrorism? The options for effectively protesting dominant power, especially after 9/11, are dwindling. This is evidenced most dramatically by the U.S. Patriot Act<sup>30</sup> and its global export in copycat laws such as Canada’s

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<sup>29</sup> Chomsky’s most cited example of this is that the U.S. is the only country convicted in the World Court of international terrorism for its invasion of Nicaragua in the 1980s. The recent U.S. invasion of Iraq, while the circumstances are far from simple, is also an example of an illegal, unsanctioned invasion by the U.S. of another sovereign nation-state.

<sup>30</sup> The U.S. Patriot Act, according to the *Concise Guide to Human Rights* (2006), “permits major rollbacks of accrued civil liberties and [is] a widely imitated piece of legislation in democracies like Canada and India, [...] only one of many new instruments that undermine rights under the guise of the so-called ‘war on terror’” (106).

anti-terrorism act and infamous “security certificate.” The present lack of avenues for individual dissent against hegemonic network structures of Empire arguably feeds this increasingly violent global protest movement. Paolo Virno, an early colleague of Antonio Negri’s and arguably another intellectual “specter” haunting *Empire*’s concept of the multitude, calls this lack of non-regulated public space in which to protest or live free of surveillance<sup>31</sup> the multitude’s uncanny experience of having no “common space” or public political sphere.<sup>32</sup> Post-9/11 protests are, in the present context of perpetual war on terror, less-and-less tolerated, and due to legal mechanisms such as the Patriot Act, much more easily controlled and contained due to an increasingly militarized, media-controlled America—a trend now mimicked by many nations across the globe.

Given the nationalistic character of Bush’s post-9/11 ethical rhetoric and the national institutions backing up its force-of-law, Derrida’s focus on the *international* subjects of globalization remains relevant in the post-9/11 context which Hardt and Negri have nonetheless called post-national, or supra-national. Even if one accepts that network structures and virtual biopolitical productions of life largely characterize our contemporary context of late-globalization/Empire, the future of “nationhood” still seems assured.<sup>33</sup> This is true even if its role has

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<sup>31</sup> For example, Bush’s infamous “extra-legal” phone-tapping which led to a federal investigation and calls for indictments of senior Bush administration officials.

<sup>32</sup> Paolo Virno, in *A Grammar of the Multitude* (2004), proposes that “if the publicness of the intellect [in the now virtual biopolitical context of globalization] does not yield to the realm of a public sphere, of a political space in which the many can tend to common affairs, then it produces terrifying effects. *A publicness without a public sphere*” (40).

<sup>33</sup> This is in spite of the laments of Carl Schmitt who wrote that “the era of stateness [*Staatlichkeit*] is nearing its end [...]. The State as the model of political unity, the State as the holder of the most

fundamentally shifted in support of a more deterritorialized global paradigm of transnational financialization, mediatization, and virtual “reality.”

*Immanence and (Non-)Messianistic Messianism*

But what are the very conditions of possibility, not only for protesting Empire, but also for “being” in it—for example, “human” (what humanity, by and for whom, and in whose interests?)—and/or possessing a livable life within its totalizing context? For Hardt, Negri, and Derrida, these are key questions which condition their ethico-political responses to “globalization/Empire” as a subjectivizing onto-epistemological paradigm of control. 9/11, while it hasn’t fundamentally changed these questions, has intensified their stakes and made their pursuit even more difficult and urgent.

Hardt and Negri argue that a key element in the contemporary shift to Empire is its “immanent” as opposed to “mediated” biopolitical production of subjectivity. This is what they mean when they say “Empire just *is*.” Hardt and Negri conceptualize Empire’s “hyper-reality” as occurring on the *plane of immanence*—a fluid, creatively human-centric, “virtualized” context which has, for them, overtaken the older, more “mediated” context of institutionalized, territorialized modernity. This rethinking of contemporaneity’s borderless “hyper-fluidity” has serious consequences for the concept of sovereignty and the

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extraordinary of all monopolies, that is to say, of the monopoly of political decision-making [...] is being dethroned” (Schmitt, *Der Begriff*, 10, qtd. in Virno *A Grammar of the Multitude* 44).



conditions under which ethics, politics, hospitality, community, and subjectivity are now negotiated. Bush's concept of "justice" is tied to his theologically oriented, universalizing embrace of Empire as created and directed by the unseen hand of God. This worldview, for Hardt and Negri, is a kind of throw back to the pre-Enlightenment *plane of transcendence*. However, the productive functioning of Bush's ethics and politics in Empire, according to Hardt and Negri's understanding of globality, has shifted *away* from such a theo-centric model and in fact operates on the plane of immanence. This, I think, is a key contradiction in post-9/11 Empire, symptomatically apparent in Bush's conflation of political realism and Wilsonian moralism. In its playing out, this conflation represents a disastrous mid-flight collision in which the plane of immanence is currently crashing head long into the plane of transcendence. Hopefully, there will be survivors.

Hardt and Negri's concept of Empire as immanence evokes a model of performative western subjectivity that they say came about after the "death of God." In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri claim that the "plane of immanence" is "the primary event of modernity" (71). This event represents a shift from the plane of transcendence, or a belief in God as the ultimate creative ordering authority over the universe, to an "immanent" view of the world such that "humans declared themselves masters of their own lives, producers of cities and history, and inventors of heaven" (75). In other words, knowledge became an anthropocentric

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endeavour of transforming nature. Humanity and human desire thus become the center of history, and its transformative power. According to Hardt and Negri, this shift to the plane of immanence caused a war. The revolution of European modernity ran into its Thermidor (Hardt and Negri, 75).<sup>34</sup> As Christian Hubert recounts in his writings on the “Plane of Immanence,” “the forces of order reestablished ideologies of command and authority. Thus modernity itself came to be defined by a crisis. And Eurocentrism became a war on two fronts—against the revolutionary forces within Europe and against the non-European world” (n.p.). It is the plane of immanence, or the creative, ontological force of human desire to reshape one’s own world that Hardt and Negri seek to harness with their revolutionary subject of the multitude. Hardt and Negri’s Spinozan and Deleuzian inflected concept of “immanence” leads them to conceptualize their “creatively” utopic approach to battling Empire as a kind of immanent project of the multitude’s “being against” by *being*—eccentrically, schizoanalytically, singularly. This approach involves the multitude creating new forms of ontology and biopolitical life in contradiction with Empire’s hegemonic finitude.

With their theory of the multitude, however, Hardt and Negri risk their dystopic term “Empire” becoming the essentialized, orienting (western-centric) straw-man of their argument’s “prophetic” Spinozian impulse<sup>35</sup> to create “being

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<sup>34</sup> Thermidor, here, refers to the guillotining of Robespierre on July 27, 1794 during the French Revolution, which brought to an end the “Reign of Terror.”

<sup>35</sup> See Paolo Virno’s *A Grammar of the Multitude* for an intriguing discussion of the ways in which Hardt and Negri adapt Spinoza’s idea that “the prophet produces its own people” (Spinoza, qtd. in Virno 16) to their own utopic concept of the multitude, a concept that they apparently borrow not only from Spinoza but also Virno. As Sylvère Lotringer notes in his Forward to

against.” In this way, the creativity of the multitude risks becoming a figure fighting to free itself from its own “repression.” (Of course, they would argue this is already the case!) Such a strategy, warns Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, ends up myopically focusing on and thus reifying and reinforcing the very hegemonic paradigm from which it sought to free itself. Hardt and Negri, however, weigh such a concern against the benefits of mass political organization of singularities-in-common by virtue of the unifying threat of global capitalism and its dominant sovereign exception over human life itself.

Derrida’s concept of non-messianistic-messianism is also quasi-utopic, but less ontological and more “weakly immanent” than Hardt and Negri’s concept of immanence. “Weak messianism,” a concept Derrida borrows from Walter Benjamin, is related to those undeconstructible elements in Derridian deconstruction itself. Derrida suggests that that which

remains irreducible to any deconstruction, what remains as undeconstructible as the possibility itself of deconstruction is, perhaps, a certain experience of the emancipatory promise; it is perhaps even the formality of a structural messianism, a messianism without religion, even a messianic without messianism, an idea of justice – which we distinguish from law or right and even from human rights – and an idea of democracy – which we distinguish from its current concept and form its determined predicates today [permit me to refer here to ‘Force of Law’ and *The Other Heading*]. But this is perhaps what must now be thought and thought

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Virno’s *Grammar of the Multitude*, “few people will realize that the multitude [in Hardt and Negri’s *Empire*] isn’t just a philosophical concept lifted from Spinoza—the democracy of the multitude—that it has a history under another name, and has been the object of vibrant collective experiments” (11), most notably in connection with the autonomist movement in Italy in the 60’s and 70’s, of which Virno and Negri were both members, and for which association both served time in Italian prison. Lotringer goes on to suggest that Hardt and Negri’s project consists, not really in changing the old autonomist-type concept, but in “placing Virno’s multitude at the heart of Empire [which] opens up an entirely new political paradigm, while conveniently keeping class struggle as the motor of history” (14).

otherwise in order to ask oneself where Marxism is going, which is also to say, where Marxism is leading and where is it to be led [*où conduire le Marxisme*]: where to lead it by interpreting it, which cannot happen without transformation, and not where can it lead us such as it is or such as it will have been. (59)

The utopic, ethico-political force of this “formality of structural messianism” is in its orientation around an undeconstructible “justice” to alterity. Such a non-messianistic messianism also conditions the “democratic” impulse of Derrida’s concept of the new international as the *unforeseeability* of what will become of it. Derrida’s quasi-utopic concept of “weak” messianism thus circumscribes within it a kind of religious “faith,” but without religion. As such, it borrows a certain formal structure from Christianity, but with the aim of holding out faith and hope for the radical other always receding from structural, or “ontologized” religious formality.

Weak messianism is weak because it is never graspable, but always to come. Likewise, the promise held out by “formal” international legal structures by which “the best” possible future(s) to come of globalization might be realized must, for Derrida, only ever be weakly held on to. In other words, what is necessary about democracy and its institutions is their ability to democratically *transform*—to *work* (another word for transformation in *Specters of Marx*) for, instead of dogmatically against, its constituents. Axiomatically, “the best,” if unforeseeable outcome(s) of such a messianistic new Internationalism, for Derrida, obtains in doing “justice” to these constituents, an ethical demand limited only by the unforeseeable demands of those radical others outside its purview.

These stateless non-citizens of the new International (this really models *all* its citizenry), like Arendt's Jewish stateless citizens, are perhaps most in need of human rights laws and protections; yet, being without affiliation, they are without the right to have rights, or even identifiable "humanity."

Messianism in *Specters of Marx* is thus a kind of paleonym—a "bad" example whose futural force, nonetheless, cannot be reduced to presence or ontological solidity. As Drucilla Cornell and Simon Critchley argue, however, this particular concept of messianism and/as justice marks the ethical limit that Derridian deconstruction is always approaching in "itself," but can never deconstruct. This is the "utopic" aspect of the new International's messianistic promise. Cornell, in *The Philosophy of the Limit*, calls this deconstructive ethical formality a kind of "postmodern allegory" that points out its own referentlessness (11). However, it is a utopia that is never "created" as such, but is always *to come* by doing justice to those forms of rights, freedoms, and legal recourses that we have to work with *right now*; rights, freedoms and institutions whose "promises" are promising, but only if they are made to be *kept* by urgently and rigorously being implemented, even at the expense of their own concepts.

*Spectral Utopianism as the Promise of Democracy to Come...NOW!*

A key aspect of the new International as a kind of quasi-messianic democratic imaginary *to come*, is that it must *come now*. We can't wait. The worst is upon us, and we *must* act—justice demands it. 9/11 is a stark reminder of

the urgency of the times. That's why utopic promises are only ever weak ones, because they never arrive. Their only use value, Derrida suggests, is as promises which, if every effort is made to keep them, work transformatively to guard against "the worst," and open up the possibility that "the best" might occur. Perhaps...we can never be sure. That is the ethical limit of a promise.

At one point in *Specters of Marx*, Derrida recalls an anecdote of Marx's in which he confides to Engels that it "is certain that I am not a Marxist" (Marx, qtd. in Derrida 34). Derrida's concept of democracy is a similar, if more contemporaneous critique in the same "spirit" as Marx's supposed refusal of Marxism. For democracy to be really democratic, in other words, it must exceed its own conceptual finitude, or formal "law." Karl Marx, for Derrida, provides one of the greatest models of just such a rigorous, self-reflexive, "proto"-deconstructive critique. For who, asks Derrida,

has ever called for the *transformation* to come of his own thesis? [...] No text in the tradition seems as lucid concerning the way in which the political is becoming worldwide, concerning the irreducibility of the technical and the media in the current of the most thinking thought – and this goes beyond the railroad and the newspapers of the time whose powers were analyzed in such an incomparable way in the *Manifesto*. And few texts have shed so much light on law, international law, and nationalism. (13)

In other words, it is in and through Marx's great attention to historical and political detail, staying with the general text of his subject of critique, that he keeps open his own discourse to its possible future(s) and spectral applications to come. Derrida's new Internationalism, as a kind of democratizing of Internationalisms *as such*, likewise stages its critique *within* the very "general

text” of its object of critique—the dominant model of globalization and those international institutions and infrastructures supposedly regulating and providing its mediating context. If, with the onset of Empire, this modernist paradigm of “mediation” has shifted to pure “immanence,” new Internationalism still obtains by and through a more “just” specter of globalization. In other words, new Internationalism holds that “resistance” to globalization’s ills and plagues are most productively staged in those very institutions and infrastructures that support and enable it—even if they have become subsumed by “Empire” itself (whatever such a subsumption really implies). However, unlike what Derrida calls Marx’s more “ontological” approach to revolution from within, new Internationalism, while embracing its “proto-deconstructive” Marxist inheritance, aims always beyond (if never claiming to exceed) its own “utopic,” ethico-political limits. In this way, new Internationalism, for Derrida, is one spectral effect *of* the history of globalization—a “history” that, nonetheless, is always *in question*, and open to multiple, heterogeneous interpretations. It never merely “is.”

Fundamentally linked with the ethico-political limits, or *undeconstructible elements*, of Derridian deconstruction itself, new Internationalism evokes “*a re-politicization, perhaps of another concept of the political*” (74-5; emphasis added). Differently put, the “political” itself is inadequate to its own concept, as its very political movement is always exceeding its formal laws and structures. Politics is thus only ever “politically” responsible, according to Derrida, when it is aiming beyond itself, to the political *to come*.

And yet, the transformative work of “aiming”—the “saying,” as opposed to what is politically “said”—must happen now. That is why “ontology” (or a focus on the shape of what is said, as opposed to the modes and methods of its saying) is such dangerous ground as the basis for political organization. Such a concept of alterity, however, is problematic for Hardt and Negri who view Derrida’s preoccupation with the “radical other” as a preoccupation with the “border spaces” of modernity which, they say, “no longer exist.” Differently put, holding out the possibility of a singular interruption of radical alterity, for them, is already foreclosed by the all-consuming context of Empire. Thus, they argue, anti-ontological critiques of History, institutionality, and identity are pointless. Instead, we need *more* ontology (strategic, alternative, *linguistic* ontology) onto which radical alterities can hang their subjective hats and find homes. Within such a (nearly) “totalizing” (they stop short of calling it an “infinite”) context of Empire, concepts, biopolitics, people and communities are all nodes very much “in play” in *différential* ways. However, their “performative” potential for making interventions into the hegemonic “ontology” of Empire is cancelled out by the totalizing conditions of their existence. In other words, argue Hardt and Negri, right now everything refers back in some way to the neo-capitalist paradigm of Empire. Their *target*, therefore, is not alterity, but its arch-nemesis, *Empire*.



*Undeconstructive Justice, “Enduring Freedom”*

Derrida’s preoccupation with the alterity *beyond* the conceptual limits of ethics and politics, however, represents for him the very possibility of justice as *justesse*—a sound, rigorous attention to the open question of the other as always in question. In short, are we concerned with doing justice to Empire, or to those radical others—those stateless citizens—whom it leaves out in the cold to go hungry? Not being an entity that eats, can the “linguistic” ontology of the multitude even comprehend such an ethical dilemma? A focus on ontology, as opposed to “life”—by which I mean that which is always exterior to and interrupting the finitude, or “deadening” closure of ontology—is a dubious pursuit refused, but not necessarily rejected by Derrida.

Derrida most clearly explains his concept of justice in his essay “Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority’.” In that essay, he unpacks this concept by way of a characteristically Derridian

paradox: it is the deconstructible structure of law (*droit*), or if you prefer of justice as *droit*, that also insures the possibility of deconstruction. Justice in itself, if such a thing exists, outside or beyond law, is not deconstructible. No more than deconstruction itself, if such a thing exists. *Deconstruction is justice.* (945; emphasis mine)

Derrida’s aporetic concept of justice circumscribes *justesse* (in French, a “soundness and rigor”) that exceeds its own more “ontologized” concept of *juste* (in French, the law, or *droit* as reified form of justice). As Derrida puts it, a “constative can be *juste* (right), in the sense of *justesse*, never in the sense of justice” (*Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice* 27). As such, this “double

figure” represents an ethical axiom in Derridian deconstruction, and is thus *undeconstructible*. In a sense, it represents the very limit, as a fundamental preoccupation with radical alterity to limits per se, of Derridian “ethics.”

If “justice,” for example, in the spectral form of bringing “terrorists” to justice, is to live up to its *promise* and be truly “just,” it must exceed its own evangelical concept as represented in Bush’s rhetoric. This is because, in the ultimately “mad” moment of decision, ethical judgment is irreducible, undecidable, and thus always inadequate to its own juridical laws and conceptual limitations. Justice, in short, is always a *judgment*. The inevitable interruption of alterity and the unforeseeable “third” into Bush’s clean, theocratically-grounded calculation of “good vs. evil” destroys a priori the very possibility of “justice” as a knowable set of moral guidelines by foreclosing radically other conceptions of “the good.” For example, Bush’s calls for “infinite justice” against the Taliban hardly seems just from the perspectives of those Afghani and unknowable other individuals whose lives are shattered on a daily basis by bombs and gunfire.

Bush’s initial code-name for the American invasion of Afghanistan, *infinite justice*, thus serves as an example *par excellence* of what is *wrong* with political concepts of justice too firmly rooted in moral absolutism. Conversely, the “spirit” of North American juridical systems, by and large, functions through court challenges as a method of testing and re-negotiating the applicability of “laws” to actual cases. However, as Habermas in his theory of universal language and Derrida in *The Gift of Death* both argue from opposing perspectives, the sole

purpose of the law is to create subjects that must always refer back to it as *the* default paradigm of power.

Accordingly, the most important aspect of Bush's en/forcement of "infinite" justice on the entire globe is its "centering" of U.S. legal authority as the de facto sovereign exception over international law encompassing the whole world. As Bob Woodward recounts in his book *Bush At War*, the Bush administration

reviewed comments that some Islamic scholars had made about the Pentagon's name for [the initial invasion of Afghanistan in the weeks following the September 11, 2001 attacks]. 'Operation Infinite Justice' had been quickly criticized for its insensitivity to the Muslim faith, which holds that only Allah can mete out infinite justice. The name was shelved. [Secretary of defense, Donald] Rumsfeld said he had decided on 'Enduring Freedom'. (134-35)

The replacement of the neo-Hegelian concept of "infinite justice" was an apparent attempt to do "justice" to that unforeseeable alterity—the Muslim faith—that interrupted and exceeded the finitude of "*infinite justice*." However, the replacement of code-name "Infinite Justice" with the equally troubling idea of "enduring freedom" hauntologically evokes the same basic theological "spirit" of American-centric, evangelical Christian justice. In interview material with Bob Woodward in *Plan of Attack*, the President confides his belief that

the United States is *the* beacon for freedom in the world. And I believe we have a responsibility to promote freedom that is as solemn as the responsibility is to protecting the American people, because the two go hand-in-hand. [...] I say that freedom is not America's gift to the world. Freedom is God's gift to everybody in the world. I believe that. [...] I believe we have a duty to free people. I would hope we wouldn't have to do it militarily, but we have a duty. [Woodward then] asked [the President] whether such a conviction translated into policy that could seem 'dangerously paternalistic' to people in other countries.

[The President's answer is] 'Unless you're the person that happens to be liberated. [...] It probably looks paternalistic to some elites, but it certainly is not paternalistic to those we free. Those who become free appreciate the zeal. And appreciate the passion. (88-89)

This shocking Manichean admission illuminates Bush's theologically held belief that he has a divine ethical duty to "free" others from evil, perhaps even against their will. Such an obligation is thus oriented not so much in response to the call emanating *from* the other, but instead *en/forces* an aggressive moral, even militaristic posture oriented *towards* the other deemed in need of American hospitality. Such an aggressivity seeks to *interpellate*—not open itself to, or unconditionally accommodate—alterity, and thus forecloses the possibility of an unforeseeable interruption in simply and steadfastly "holding the course" of its prescribed moral intervention. The other, for Bush, is thus *already* the subject of American Freedom and "justice," whose universal humanity is afflicted with a moral illness in need of a remedy. Bush's measure for success in the ethical action of "freeing" the other is thus the extent to which the other is made to *become* free, even by force if necessary. The Bush administration clearly overestimated the grateful "embracing" of American troops enforcing freedom in Afghanistan and Iraq. In other words, a third, unforeseeable element seems to have interrupted the smooth progress towards Iraqi's freedom. This is an always mediating, irreducible power dynamics of "other more palatable options" for Iraqi and Afghani citizens facing invasion and the possible destruction of their countries—the cure that is itself a deadly disease.

Which raises the question, what is this “cure” really *for*? Instructively, Empire is symptomatically evoked in Bush’s concept of “enduring freedom” as an immanent ethico-political community reflecting the “infinite” moral context of right-wing American evangelical Christianity. Freedom resonates between Bush’s call for “enduring freedom” for Iraqis and free markets. This is backed up in concrete terms by Bush’s interests in Iraqi oil. The recent book *Confessions of an Economic Hit-Man* by John Perkins sheds even more damning light on such resonances by suggesting that the Iraqi invasion was an inevitable consequence of Saddam’s refusal to “play ball” with American corporate interests, and those same interests’ subsequent failure to assassinate him. On the one hand, Bush’s global war on Terror is thus a key force-of-law normativizing a particular specter of “justice” in Empire. On the other hand, the war itself finds its condition of possibility via Empire’s globalized infrastructures of telecommunications networks, transnational financialization, computer technologies, globalized transportation networks (for a privileged few), and the ubiquitous reach of the military. Even further, however, to “free” the other, seems more likely to mean freeing the ideal corporate citizen of Empire, which most accurately resembles the juridically defined corporate “human” subject (dis)embodied in the corporate entity itself.

### *Hard Work*

The status of “freedom” thus raises some nagging questions: whose freedom? By whom, for whom, and in whose interests this freedom? The work of answering *these* questions involves outlining the contours and contradictions of the hypostatized ethical subject of Bush’s post-9/11 ethical rhetoric. The critical “work” I undertake here aims at a slow, transformative interrogation of the subject of post-9/11 Empire and the conditions of its subjective “freedom.” But what constitutes “work,” “action” and/or “activism” as carried out by such a subject? The “hard work” of the “war on terror,” according to Marc Redfield, also implies a kind of “War on Theory.” This is evidenced in Bush’s 2005 inaugural address, where he dismisses Marx’s rigorous critique of capitalism as a form of communist terrorism and an academicist waste of time. Too much work devoted to thinking, for Bush, clearly amounts to a kind of *in*-action that invites the wolves to enter unfettered by the front gate.<sup>36</sup>

For Hardt and Negri, the type of work or “productivity” most proper to Empire is the production of human life itself. Read alongside Judith Butler’s model of performative subjectivity, which she recently expands upon in her book *Precarious Life* to circumscribe the very normativization of global humanity, Empire can be understood as the current globalized law that almost totally dictates the power relations normativizing livable human life. This involves the

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<sup>36</sup> This is one of the sentiments expressed in Bush’s “Mushroom Cloud as a Smoking Gun” speech, delivered in Cincinnati, Ohio on October 7, 2002, as well as the presupposition driving his “Doctrine of Prevention.”

biopolitical production of the very concept of “humanity” to which singular subjects of power are always imperfectly referring to and constantly reinaugurating anew in an ongoing, if completely imbalanced, global power-dynamics. Empire, argue Hardt and Negri, is the most contemporary model of this production of life—life which is both produced by and performatively re-produces Empire.

The type of “hard work” that President Bush continuously evokes in his post-9/11 ethical rhetoric “works” in effect like a cog in the larger bioproduction of “human” subjects subject to Empire. This normativization of “life”—good vs. evil life, biopolitically relevant vs. bare, sacrificeable “terrorist” life, dualisms inscribed on the very bodies of prisoners at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay—involves the “hard work” of militaristic and economic policing, the violent control over whole populations, and the commission of state terrorism in order to effect a global exportation of western democracy and “human freedom” abroad against “terror.” Bush’s rhetoric of “hard work” also works to obfuscate the disastrous failures of his domestic and foreign policy in Iraq, Afghanistan, and abroad. These effects—such as illegal detentions, insurgent uprisings, the facilitation of the spread of terrorism and violence, the rapid decline of “democratic” law and order all over the world—he views as regrettable yet necessary “collateral damage” in the hard work required to achieve his morally absolute ends.

Bush’s concept of hard work also cheapens and demeans other forms of work involved in fighting terror, such as the difficult work of criminally

prosecuting terrorists instead of putting the globe on a war footing, slowly and rigorously debating the many possible responses to “terror,” or even the agonizing diplomatic work of reconciling and/or forgiving in order to restore peace and a cessation to violence. Such responses, while not as “media savvy” as the more spectacular terror war, are instead more oriented towards a concept of work that attempts to produce more rigorous, sound, and “just” results. These might include more accountability to other possible specters of “humanity” instead of merely policing and producing a morally absolutist version of livable human life, or even an attempt to avoid violence and suffering by fostering peace and reconciliation.

The universal ethical subject of Bushian Freedom, however, sees no use value in such slow deliberation. Being universal, they need only refer to the moral rule-book (an evangelical Christian reading of the Bible from a narrowly “compassionate conservative” perspective) in order to understand what their “job” is. The “Spirit” of justice is violently and swiftly retributive in that particular reading. Such a clean, clear division between winner and loser, good and evil, right and wrong, is also deeply embedded in the universalizing discourse of Empire. This may seem counterintuitive, given the apparent psychopathic amorality of global corporate entities endowed with “human rights” yet without remorse in the singular pursuit of *the* bottom line. However, the economic bottom line of neo-capitalist globalization, as conceived of by Adam Smith, evokes a kind of neo-Hegelian “Spirit” of work which has been viewed by most economists as



operating in-and-for-itself “as if by an invisible hand.”<sup>37</sup> In other words, the a-moral ends of gaining capital, in a perverse reversal, somehow is justified by the democratizing means of attaining it via the “free” market forces of globalization, and the “healthy” competition that such a system fosters. Free trade, in fact, has often been justified by the presupposition that a democratization, or “opening” of markets will “naturally” encourage better human rights and freedoms in participating countries.<sup>38</sup> However, this idealist view of economic “work” is in contradiction with its own purported ends of “Freedom,” “justice” and

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<sup>37</sup> Only recently have contemporary economists, such as Joseph E. Stiglitz, begun to question the almost divine foundationalism implicit in Adam Smith’s early claims for capitalism. “Indeed,” writes Stiglitz, “more recent advances in economic theory—ironically occurring precisely during the period of the most relentless pursuit of the Washington Consensus policies [espoused by the IMF as fundamentalist economic prescriptions for globalization]—have shown that whenever information is imperfect and markets incomplete, which is to say always, *and especially in developing countries*, then the invisible hand works most imperfectly” (Stiglitz, *Globalization and its Discontents*, 73).

<sup>38</sup> One Canadian example of how globalization and “human rights” are often conflated is Thomas D’Aquino’s speech “Reconciling Globalization and Human Rights.” In it, he links “democratization,” which for him is a kind of neoliberal code for the highest form of moral/political governance, to what he sees as a “new openness” (290) related to the effects of trade liberalization, or increased in- and out-flows of capital across national borders. For D’Aquino, globalization through western-style capitalism “naturally” leads to democracy, which in turn “naturally” leads to improved standards of human rights. D’Aquino’s views reflect a pervasive axiomatic view within the global corporate community and governments that western-style globalization, trade-liberalization and economic “modernization” are in effect the same as democratization and the institution of western liberal values in regard to respect for human rights. Setting aside for a moment the conceptual problems with taking western-style liberal values and democracy to be essentially “good,” or universally “moral” institutions, we note that the specious logic of “letting the marketplace take care of human rights problems” has largely become the norm driving western government policy. This trend was demonstrated, for example, in the rhetoric surrounding Canada’s trade agreement a few years ago with China during which the Canadian government suggested that the agreement would, in spite of the smug denials of its trade partner, “naturally” move China towards western-style “democratization” and thus towards a better human rights record (“Canada and China Sign Bilateral Trade Agreement,” *Post-Intelligencer News Services* 27 Nov 1999). Another example is the Human Development Report 2002 put out by the United Nations, which emphasizes a link between economic growth, (western-style) democracy and human rights (Brown v-vi). George Bush Jr., of course, states repeatedly his contradictory view that, to paraphrase, democracies don’t fight each other, and therefore the U.S., the most powerful democracy in the world, should “encourage” (violently or otherwise) all countries to become democratic.

“democracy.” Furthermore, it resembles the relentless spread of late-globalization/Empire and/as economic neo-colonialism. Of course, what is required for President Bush’s concept of “hard work” to *work* is that there are morally absolute, politically immanent ends; otherwise, the “productivity” of such work is thrown into question. In the absence of such foundational ethical sense-certainty, Bush’s concept of “hard work” is not only unproductive, but is in fact disastrously *counter*-productive—even *destructive*—by its own extremely narrow standards of bringing “democracy” and “freedom” to the world through the imperialist enterprise of “war on terror.” This is nowhere more apparent than in the widely acknowledged failure of the war in Iraq, and its terrible daily death toll, including more than 3,000 civilian deaths per month at this time of writing (December 2006). In fact, from a radically other perspective to that of Bush, the hard work involved in the war *against* terror in fact *wreaks* terror on those very individuals it is meant to “save.”

Bush’s “hard work” of fighting the war on terror and imposing global democracy is thus not productive, but totally *irresponsible*. This seems painfully obvious. Yet, why have the Bush administration’s policies been able to prevail for so long in such outrageously destructive ways with so little or ineffective opposition? At least part of the answer seems to be that this administration’s post-9/11 ethico-political rhetoric, so outrageously illogical and destructive on the surface, nonetheless resonates strongly with a deeper, long-normativized logic of Empire, the most enabling context of which is total war. As a symptom of

Empire, the outrageousness of Bush's post-9/11 ethical rhetoric merely brings more clearly to the surface what Derrida calls the suicidal autoimmunity that has been operating more and less clandestinely in connection with the wider network structures of globalization/Empire over its history. From this perspective, Bush's post-9/11 ethical rhetoric provides an occasion for close analysis of Empire, and opportunities for transforming its idealized concept of "work" into work more productive of respectful, rigorous responses to 9/11.

### *Mourning Work*

One such responsible rethinking of work in relation to 9/11, I argue, is the work of mourning modeled in Derrida's *Specters of Marx*. In that book, work invokes *transformation* (Derrida, 9), a "dimension of performative interpretation, that is, of an interpretation that transforms the very thing it interprets" (51). This thinking of work is inextricably linked with the work of "mourning. We will be speaking of nothing else" (9) says Derrida, implying a kind of ubiquity to mourning work that extends to all aspects of subjective being, consciousness, communication and memory. Like the exorc-analytic work of critique, mourning work entails the conjuration of the specter of a "life," which was never anything but thoroughly spectral. This kind of transformative, de-onto-materialization of a "specter" that occurs via the work of mourning thus changes the "thing itself" as much as it is a mourning, conjuration, or calling back of the other for a brief, nostalgic audience in and always through our memories of them. This

transformative mourning work, in fact, allows the other to *live on* in infinitely altered states, by *working in, on, and through us* via their singular, spectral interruptions into our memory. Even if such singular interruptions are deferred, even after “death,” the living *work* it does on us is no less surprising, or productive. This, for me, is part of that “life itself,” a life that exceeds its presupposed eschatological limits.

Derrida further unpacks the ways in which life and death subtend and breach each other’s borders, in part, via the language with which we name and mourn for the corpse. This language exceeds its linguistic demarcation of that death, and thus continues posthumously to *work* on that “spirit,” causing it to “live on” via the medium of textuality. This is part of the spirit’s spectral inheritance, and as such, is inseparable from the “spirit” as such. As Derrida explains, “the thing *works*, whether it transforms or transforms itself, poses or decomposes itself: the spirit, the ‘spirit of the spirit’ is *work*” (9). Composition and de-composition, in this passage, exceed the eschatological limits of a “death,” by re-“composing” the very idea of what that life entailed, and the “mediums” in and through which it “presents” itself. Transformation is thus another name for work, like de-composition is but the flip-side of the same work of composition. Even in Bush’s figuration of the “shipwreck of communism” in his 2005 Freedom Speech, he immediately refigures this death as but a lull, or “calm” before its irrepressible return in the “fire-storm” of 9/11. Thus, in a sense, Bush’s own ethical rhetoric de-composes itself by recomposing the pastoral calm of global

capitalist triumphalism as but an illusory “sabbatical” masking the inevitable return of its own repressed, traumatic other—Marx’s indelible critique.

But work also conjures up a Hegelian model of consciousness in which a dialectical relation between a master and a slave is finally transcended through the slave’s work. This Hegelian sense of work is much more in line with Bush’s own idealization of the deaths of “Americans” as representing universalized, symbolic moral content, whose “Spirit,” ideally conceived, must be defended *to the death* against evil. And evil, for Hegel, is basically an individualism that departs from the ideal of universal Spirit; a universal moral “essence” or “Notion” that, for Bush, roughly resembles the Christian evangelical moral principles of “compassionate conservatism.”

Hegel argues in *Phenomenology of Spirit* that the “individual” is only knowable as such after it is dead, in and through the properly familial and, for him, feminized work of mourning. This evokes a kind of “privatization” of mourning work, whereas the more important, “manly” work of killing is, for Hegel, proper to the public sphere. Bush’s compassionate conservatism would likely lead him to accord with Hegel’s assessment, at least in “spirit” if not to the last detail. To push this neo-Hegelian analogy even further, Bush and Hegel conceptualize an eschatological reading of “life” that can only conceive of the “other” in relation to their memorialization within an idealized, universal “self.” As Derrida observes, however, the concept of the other’s “life” begins, in this sense, even before they are born, and that “life” continues to “work” on us long

after its so-called eschatological “end.” What obtains from a certain dogmatic reading of Hegel’s observation, in fact, is that the best way to get to know the absolute (or “evil”) other is to *kill* them! Likewise for Bush, it is only ever the victor’s historical opinion that need be taken account of in the final historical decree to occlude evil (or what Hegel called too individualistic) “life.”

The memorialization of 9/11 in Bush’s ethical rhetoric largely hinges on the ways in which 9/11 is construed by him as living on as a sacred, transcendental signifier commemorating the unforgivable deaths that occurred that day as a result of terrorism. As such, it becomes a ready ethical alibi for Bush’s own policies. The ethics and politics of memorializing this “event,” however, now 5 years after the fact, are still hotly contested, and indelibly tied in with larger infrastructural influences such as capitalism—i.e. the possible uses of that expensive real estate on which the attacks occurred—and the “globalization” of a particular democratic moral paradigm in honour of 9/11. Many of these issues are at play in the controversy surrounding the proposed “Freedom Center” in New York,<sup>39</sup> which exemplifies the ways in which national institutions, global corporate interests, private citizens, globalized media, all colour the controversies surrounding how the “victims” and/or lost “lives” of 9/11 *should* be remembered. But what “lives,” lived by and for whom, and remembered in whose particular interests? Certain types of mourning work often attempt to *concretely* answer such questions. David Simpson, in his recent book *9/11: The Culture of*

*Memorialization* (2006), suggests that the “Freedom Center” design originally proposed by the architect Daniel Libeskind evokes a similar morally absolute, religiously charged nationalistic spirit of mourning and remembrance as his famous Holocaust memorials.<sup>40</sup> This spiritual language is underscored in Libeskind’s own description of the design, in which he suggests that once his building is erected,

the sky will be home again to a towering spire of 1776 feet high, the Antenna Tower with gardens. Why gardens? Because gardens are a constant affirmation of life. A skyscraper rises above its predecessors, reasserting the pre-eminence of freedom and beauty, restoring the spiritual peak to the city, creating an icon that speaks of our vitality in the face of danger and our optimism in the aftermath of tragedy. Life victorious. (Libeskind, “Memory Foundations,” n.p.)

The tower’s height, 1776—also the year of American independence—ties the Edenic imagery of a “garden in the sky” to American nationalism. Libeskind’s language of moral absolutism and indeed Christian theology is thus coupled with the militaristic language of American “vitality” in the face of “danger:” “Life victorious.” Further, Libeskind’s description, as well as the design itself, offers an example of how the sublimation of 9/11 as idealized “ethical event” has entailed an etymological shift in what signifies, through such institutionalized mourning work, the official, globally designated “ultimate evil” that the “world” identifies as its ultimate source of moral indignation, and against which it defines

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<sup>39</sup> What to do with the site of the World Trade Center disaster is a still ongoing controversy, one not yet resolved at this time of writing (December 2006).

<sup>40</sup> Daniel Libeskind’s official website is available at: <http://www.daniel-libeskind.com/>. His actual description of The World Trade Center Design Study is available at: <http://www.daniel-libeskind.com/press/index.html>.

its most exemplary concept of “Human Freedom.”<sup>41</sup> The competition to shape such a global ethical discourse, as Bush’s Freedom Speech demonstrates, is fierce. The stakes of this institutionalized mourning work are no less than the reification of absolute “moral authority,” a key weapon employed by Bush in his rhetorical war on terror.

Derrida’s *hauntological* concept of mourning-work, on the other hand, is concerned with doing justice to the negotiation of the *limits* and *transformation* of human life and death that mourning “work” implies. Terrorism functions

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<sup>41</sup> David Simpson, in his recent book *9/11: The Culture of Memorialization* (2006), argues that “the massive national debate about memory and memorialization in relation to history has the potential to reinvigorate a debate about these issues that previously had been focused on the Holocaust and had before 9/11 been widely felt to be approaching its exhaustion” (15). An example of the recent etymological roots of how global humanity understands “evil” is provided by Samantha Power’s Pulitzer Prize winning book *A Problem From Hell*, which details the genealogy of “genocide” legislation, including the intensive etymological research that Ralph Lemkin undertook before coining this term. Lemkin, a survivor of the Holocaust in which most of his family were killed, championed genocide legislation even before the “worst” of the Nazi genocide of Jews and other minority groups had taken place. Nonetheless, his term is deeply connected with that event, which has long served as the “ultimate” moral example of why genocide needed to be guarded against by an international law. Indeed, Lemkin’s concept of genocide, Power notes, constituted the first “moral” legislation ever introduced at the United Nations, and has been an orienting ethical issue, up until 9/11, underlying international human rights legislation, specifically, as the text book case by which the international community has attempted to come to a collective understanding of what constitutes the “ultimate evil,” or “the worst” possible *ethical* outcome against which, at all costs, it should pursue extraordinary *political* measures. Arguably, since 9/11, “terror” has taken over top spot from genocide as the most dominant lexicographical signifier of “ultimate evil” orienting the global ethical climate of humanity, and as the “worst” moral measure against which the “justice” of laws like the “Patriot Act,” or extra-legal operations such as the proposed military tribunals in Guantanamo Bay, are judged. Another indication of this trend is provided by interview material with President Bush himself in Bob Woodward’s book *Plan of Attack*. In that book, President Bush emphasises his extended meeting with the Holocaust survivor and most important voice in the memorialization of the Holocaust, Elie Wiesel—a meeting that occurred during Bush’s deliberations over whether or not to invade Iraq. Wiesel, Bush recounts at length, lends his whole-hearted support to the invasion of Iraq, even *compelling* Bush to do it. Such a gesture, staged in an influential book like Woodward’s (a “context” whose strategic importance cannot have been lost on the Bush administration’s political strategy analysts), basically lends “ethical” credence to the dubious political decision to stage a “hot” war on terror—and specifically the very unpopular war in Iraq—by linking both with the Holocaust as its clear inheritor to the cause of justice against “ultimate evil.”



primarily through the fear of random death to someone's life. What if "life" is not so easily definable, and the circumstances surrounding its "death" are not so easily mournable as an *absolutely* evil act? Part of the slower process of mourning necessary for approaching such urgent questions is to go beyond a mere ontologization of the "death" in and of itself. Indeed, such a death is irreducible to a *single* memory sacrificed for a *certain* set of interests and ideals. As much as the "life" was thoroughly spectral, so is this death—itsself inseparable from the "life" as such, and haunted by many possible contexts, questions and contingencies. This rethinking of such a "death," like those singular, irreducible deaths coincident with the World Trade Center disaster, *works* to transform the need for "vengeance" into merely one possible avenue of retribution and opens the door to the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation. As Derrida explains near the beginning of *Specters of Marx*, his book is, in one sense, first and foremost about mourning, which

consists always in attempting to ontologize remains, to make them present, in the first place by *identifying* the bodily remains and by *localizing* the dead (all ontologization, all semanticization—philosophical, hermeneutical, or psychoanalytical—finds itself caught up in this work of mourning but, as such, it does not yet think it; we are posing here the question of the specter, to the specter, whether it be Hamlet's or Marx's, on this near side of such thinking). One has to know. *One has to know it. One has to have knowledge* [Il faut le savoir]. Now, to know is to know *who* and *where*, to know whose body it really is and what place it occupies—for it must stay in its place. [...] Nothing could be worse, for the work of mourning, than confusion or doubt: one *has to know* who is buried where—and it *is necessary* (to know—to make certain) that, in what remains of him, *he remain there*. Let him stay there and move no more! (9)

The work of mourning, of attempting to ontologize remains, of erecting a stone and ascribing a date of birth and death, of circumscribing the circumstances of certain deaths, of coming to an understanding of the meaningfulness of lives and/or the meaningless of their demise, determining true “knowledges” of these eschatological “events,” of cataloguing the “facts” surrounding those deaths in order to exact decisively “ethical” retribution; this is arguably the fundamental, instrumental function of Bush’s post-9/11 ethical rhetoric. Yet, does the war on terror do “justice” to the memory of 9/11’s victims? And who exactly qualifies as a legitimate, *mournable* victim of terrorism?

And yet, mourn we *must*. But how can one “justly” mourn the dead? And by this, I mean not selectively or instrumentally, but openly and with mindfulness of the urgency of ethico-political action on their behalves, yet tempered by a clear understanding that such “actions” can only ever be undertaken from the multiple, heterogeneous perspective(s) of the mourner(s), as is always the case? Inasmuch as the Bush administration seems to assume a kind of universal moral decisiveness delivered directly from God that ostensibly frees the Bush administration from ethico-political responsibility for their actions, by any reasonable measure most of these actions haven’t been “just.”

Another key contemporary example of the intense ethical negotiations at play in the mourning work connected to 9/11 is offered by Judith Butler in *Precarious Life: The Power of Violence and Mourning* (2004). This book argues that the ways in which we mourn human loss after the violence associated with

9/11 has a key impact on how we negotiate the very limits of “human life” itself. Butler asks, for example, why some humans seem more “mournable” than other, usually “foreign” (non-American) humans, particularly according to the American government and popular media? And how do the ways in which we mourn violence performatively *renegotiate* the normative limits and borders of inclusion in and exclusion from “humanity?” She raises these ethical questions in the context of how collective mourning-work after 9/11 has impacted human rights law, the ethical treatment of prisoners in the “War on Terror” (xv-xvi) and the ways in which one group’s “terrorism” is often treated as another group’s defense of its own freedom against evildoers.

Butler points to the ways in which the extensive coverage of the death of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl constructed his life and death in terms of American martyrdom; as a hero killed on the “front lines” in the U.S. war in Afghanistan (37). Butler contrasts Pearl’s treatment with the *New York Times*’ refusal to print an obituary for two Palestinian families killed by the Israeli military, because “the newspaper did not wish to offend anyone” (35). Why, Butler asks, is the American journalist seemingly more mournable than the Palestinian families? And who ultimately gets to decide who is “for us” (more human) and who is “against us” (less human)? Butler’s provisional ethical solution is to try to understand our collective humanity, via Levinasian ethics, as a universal vulnerability to violence. Such understanding can be accomplished, she says, by a slower, more careful practice of mourning – one that doesn’t jump to

patriotic calls for revenge or to idealizations of “our” martyrs who fall defending us from so-called “evil.” However, Butler’s reading of Levinas perhaps occludes the fact that the surprising, singular interruption of the other doesn’t necessarily lead us to empathize with that other, to share with the other a common “vulnerability,” or even to not kill them. However, like Levinas’s own example of “hunger,” Butler’s analysis is useful in its striving for “universal” (if ultimately impossible) linkages between humans for better grasping how to unconditionally open ourselves to the *possibility* of the other, instead of simply rejecting them a priori.

*Conclusion: Multitude, a Specter of the Democracy/ies to Come?*

In the final paragraphs of his discussion in *Ethics, Politics, Subjectivity* of Derrida’s concept of new Internationalism, Simon Critchley concludes his critique of Derridian ethics, particularly as they are conceived in the “political” form of “democracy to come,” with a provocation:

What the infinite ethical demand of deconstruction requires is a theory of *hegemonization*, that is, an account of the political conceived in terms of strategy and tactics, power and force, as well as an account of institutionalization, and—most importantly—the fraught question of the figure(s) around which a radical democratic politics can articulate itself and become effective—the question of identification, of social movements, and the credibility of the party form. The logics of deconstruction and hegemony need to be soldered at this point, I think, in a reciprocal relation of supplementarity. For if what deconstruction lacks in its thinking of the political is a thematization of democratization as hegemony, then what the theory of hegemony lacks is the kind of messianic, ethical injunction to infinite responsibility that prevents it collapsing into a voluntaristic decisionism. *If ethics without politics is empty, then politics without ethics is blind.* (283; emphasis added)

I think Critchley may be right here in his assessment of Derrida's "new International," even if Critchley's statements are dated to the extent that they seem specifically haunted by Laclau and Mouffe's book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985). As Hardt and Negri also infer, new Internationalism may lack perhaps a sufficiently solidified "program" to allow its (non-)citizens to concretize the ways in which they can *change* International and global institutions for the better. However, Derrida's new Internationalism, importantly, provides a crucial (un-)groundwork for responsibly and rigorously approaching, for example, how International institutions might better live up to the promises they still haven't kept, as well as Hardt and Negri's strategically ontological politics aimed at making such changes occur *immanently*. Critchley's book was written in 1999, the same year as the publication of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire*. The latter book, even aside from this coincidence of dates, seems to answer directly Critchley's call for a kind of ethico-political soldering of deconstruction with more Marxist or post-Marxist theories of hegemony. Hardt and Negri would likely deny such an allegation. But if *Empire* isn't a spectral footnote to Derrida, could Derrida's project be read perhaps as an homage to, or even a quasi-messianistic calling-forth *avant la lettre* of Hardt and Negri's project? *Empire* and *Multitude* are, after all, just such "specters of Marx."

The aim of this chapter has been to bring the ethico-political projects of Derrida, Bush, and Hardt and Negri into dialogue in a spirit similar to that of Critchley's provocation. Such an approach, as I've argued throughout, is in fact

already at work—as a kind of self-directed “auto-deconstruction”—within Hardt and Negri’s own project. 9/11 has perhaps raised the stakes of such a dialogue, particularly in regards to the ways in which post-9/11 ethical rhetoric is now intensely disputing the normative limits and exclusions of “humanity.” What I’ve argued in this chapter is that post-9/11 ethical rhetoric such as that of Bush would greatly benefit from remaining open and hospitable to the ethico-political spectral remainders that haunt it nonetheless. This approach, I argue, is modeled by Hardt and Negri’s project to the extent to which their very terms and concepts seem to invite multiple, heterogeneous interpretations and contestations, even if Hardt and Negri tend to downplay this intertextual “play” in their rejection of poststructuralist approaches in favour of “utopia.” My intervention has been to closely read for this spectral play in their “two-handed” critique—for example, by demonstrating the unresolved tensions within *Empire*’s very terms. Such as that between non-messianistic messianism and immanence, between the non-citizen of new Internationalism and those singularities-in-common comprising the multitude, and finally Derrida’s concern for the radical alterity of the third which strains the ethico-political limit’s of the multitude’s linguistic ontology, the supposed “proper” habitus of singularities *against* Empire. Bush’s ethico-political project, which I see as a symptom of what Hardt and Negri call “empire,” is thus also “infected” with spectral remainders in Empire which complexify, contest, and threaten its universalizing rhetoric from within like a suicidal autoimmunity.

Of course, Derrida's is only one specter haunting post-9/11 ethics in Empire. Subsequent chapters bring other specters of contemporary ethics into play in and through the context of Empire, such as those of Nietzsche, Nancy, Agamben, Butler, Hegel, a history of American compassionate conservatism and its Manichean roots, as well as the spectral, hyper-real contexts of global media and its representations of 9/11 and the "war on terror."

Read in this "spirit," Derrida's *Specters of Marx* affirms a kind of affinity with Marxism, but also with its specters *to come*. In particular, *Specters of Marx* conjures in advance those "utopic" (or post-postmodern) critiques of Empire undertaken by Hardt and Negri. Derrida's *Specters of Marx* is thus, in one sense, a specter of *Empire to come*. Now, if Hardt and Negri are concerned with thinking an "ethical" specter of Empire—particularly in the violent, closed, universalizing era of post-9/11 globalization, perhaps they should slowly and carefully rethink the ways in which they ontologize the remains of "postmodernism" for the purpose of dating and definitively killing off one of its key remainders. This would allow their project to *model* an ethical approach to globality by remaining open and hospitable to a key spectral other of *Empire*, Derridian deconstruction.

## Chapter 2

### Post-9/11 Ethics in Empire

Modern man suffers from a weakened personality. As the Roman of the imperial era became un-Roman in relation to the world which stood at his service, as he lost himself in the flood of foreigners which came streaming in and degenerated in the midst of the cosmopolitan carnival of gods, arts and customs, so the same must happen to modern man who allows his artists in history to go on preparing a world exhibition for him. – Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” 83

In the previous chapter, I argued that Hardt and Negri’s dystopic-utopic concepts of Empire-multitude are haunted by a number of competing Specters of ethics which complexify their project and leave it productively open to different ways of reading it. That chapter focused in particular on how the specter of Derridian new Internationalism haunts Hardt and Negri’s project as part of the latent deconstructive side of their method. The specters of new Internationalism, I argued, represent an (anti-)utopic critique which, as opposed to simply “being against” Empire, stages an “exorc-analyses”—a critique that is also an invocation and accorporation—of the globalized (inter-)national and non-governmental institutions, transnational technologies, infrastructures, and recourses to rights and democratic freedoms that we have *to hand* in order to better realize their radical promise for changing Empire’s uncertain, suicidal course *right now*.

In this chapter, I focus on the question of the post-9/11 subject of Empire, in particular, the way in which Hardt, Negri and the Bush administration construct this subject as universally and immanently *social*. The key question I route



through each section of this chapter is: In what way does such a rendering of the post-9/11 subject as solely “social being” preclude other knowledges and questions that remain essential for understanding the status of the subject—even “the human”—in our post-9/11 world? Each section of the chapter interrogates a different irreducible spectral remainder in Empire that throws into question the primacy of “the socio-discursive” as the foundational ground for post-9/11 subjectivity, and complexifies Hardt and Negri’s conceptualization of the subject of Empire. These include Roland Barthes and Friedrich Nietzsche’s concepts of *plasticity*, Jean Luc Nancy’s and Giorgio Agamben’s concepts of *singularity*, and Judith Butler’s concepts of *performativity* and *power*. Like Empire’s Derridian remainders, these specters of Empire are surprisingly anti-ontological and “deconstructive,” given Hardt and Negri’s outwardly “utopic” and creatively ontological project. They serve, therefore, to complicate and complexify their argument, but also to demonstrate the ways in which these very tensions and aporias are presently haunting Empire and its most dominant and dangerous symptoms, such as the post-9/11 ethical rhetoric of President Bush. In Hardt and Negri’s project, these irreducible tensions within their very terms are *strategically* deployed to keep their project *open* to multiple, heterogeneous readings and unforeseen contingencies. Yet these same tensions, when interrogated in the context of post-9/11 ethical rhetorics of Empire such as Bush’s, however, signify a universalizing *closure* of Empire to its others—a closure that also represents

Empire's normative and permanent "state of exception" over the biopolitical limits and livable lives of its subjects.

### *An Empire of Plastic*

In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri deploy the concept of "plasticity" to describe the "plastic, and constitutive technology" of Empire's juridical "right" (26), as well as its very biopolitical terrain; that "plastic and fluid terrain of the new communicative, biological, and mechanical technologies" of globalization/Empire (218). Two spectral remainders haunting *Empire*'s evocation of plasticity are Friedrich Nietzsche and Roland Barthes. Nietzschean plasticity haunts Hardt and Negri's project in such a way as to unhinge the unifying structure—or "commonality"—interconnecting its singular beings-in-common, which collectively form the multitude and its universalizing plane of the social. Approaching the plastic elements of the multitude in this way means thinking of it not as "natural" or "organic," but instead as a kind of strategically engineered prosthetic—a malleable plastic mould for flexibly containing and focusing political subjectivity for a specific purpose. Read in and through the spectral remainders of Nietzschean plasticity, I argue, the theoretical apparatus provided by Hardt and Negri for conceptualizing the *Multitude* is enriched and complexified by invoking an ungrounding, (pre-)deconstructive element. Yet, their deployment of plasticity is perhaps strategically under-theorized—like the multitude, just barely sketched out in spite of an entire book devoted to the

subject—and thus left open to other competing specters to interrupt and contest its Nietzschean remainders. For example, Roland Barthes devotes an entire chapter—“Plastic”—to an ideo-mythological account of plasticity in his book *Mythologies* (1957). Though Barthes is writing a century later than Nietzsche, Nietzschean plasticity has a strikingly more contemporaneous, “post-structuralist” feel to it than Barthes’ more “structuralist” understanding of the term. Indeed, there are both intertextual resonances and telling differences between Nietzsche’s and Barthes’ concepts of plasticity, in particularly the ways in which both terms serve as occasions for thinking through how biopower is understood by Hardt and Negri to be operating in relation to the social production of “life” in *Empire*.

### *Barthes’ Mythological Plastic*

Barthes’ discussion of plastic and plasticity is ostensibly in reference to a ceramics exhibition in Paris that he attended sometime between 1954 and 1956. However, the implications of his discussion extend far beyond that context. At the time, his book represented an innovative approach to structural linguistics that extended Saussure’s semiotic theory beyond “literature” as such and into the socio-cultural realms of ethics, politics and ideological productions of subjectivity. Barthes stages this critique as a study of the “mythologies,” or signifying semiological apparatuses, of “French daily life” (11).

Plastic, says Barthes, is “in essence the stuff of alchemy” because “more than a substance, [it] is the very idea of its infinite transformation” (97). This

infinite transformative process, he says, involves “transforming the original crystals into a *multitude* of more and more startling objects” in such a way that “it can become buckets as well as jewels” (97; emphasis added). What is conceptualized as the base “material” of the plastic here is divested of intrinsic “value” (or, of the “mythologies” propping up such concepts of value). Barthes then refocuses on mode of production of plastic objects to show how this is indicative of how their effects of value and meaning are inaugurated and normativized, but also to uncover the mechanized technologies, power dynamics, and embedded ideological procedures involved in this production. Barthes’ reading of the plastics exhibition thus has clear ethico-political resonances beyond the “aesthetics” of the objects themselves. It extends—via Saussurian semiotics—to the ideological structures that undergird everyday socio-cultural networks, images and practices whose meanings and differential values are *seemingly* apparent and are thus often taken for granted as “essentialized” signposts grounding daily human existence. What Barthes describes as the “magic” transformative power of plastic thus contains a Marxist proto-poststructuralist critique of value along the following lines: First, Barthes views the seemingly “magical” transformation of plastic into daily objects as being in actuality the effects of ideological myths produced for the purposes of controlling and disciplining individual subjects and whole populations. Second, he sees the bucket, for example, as having the same basic value as jewels, based on the fact they are both “essentially” products made out of plastic. This argument thus

resonates in a nascent form with later postmodernist arguments that in the age of late capitalism, Bach and the Beatles become valued similarly based on the idea that they are both commodities with similar modes of production, distribution, and “materiality” (for example, if both are reproduced in CD format).

Barthes’ critique of ideological production extends even to the production of subjectivity. He assigns a kind of cyborg “humanity” to the plastic objects in the exhibit whose production is watched over by an equally cyborg-like “attendant in a cloth cap, half-god, half-robot” (97). These plastic objects thus become resonant with a kind of spectral commodification of human subjectivity. This picture is thus pointedly resonant with Benjamin’s description of the machine worker in his essay “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire”: the cloth capped semi-God, semi-cyborg worker resembling a kind of Cartesian reflection of the “magical” process of producing plastic items divinely endowed with intrinsic “value”—the magical effect of individuation via mechanized uniformity.

What Barthes calls the “crystallization” of (human) being is described here as the production of a kind of “multitude” of infinite variety. The resonances with Hardt and Negri’s multitude are inescapable: both figure collectivities of multiple, heterogeneous singularities whose subjectivities-in-common are nonetheless determined in direct relation to an ideological Empire that dictates the normative biopolitical forms that such lives may take. Barthes’ understands his concept of the multitude to be ultimately debased due to the ways in which these same crystals are rendered down into a telluric type of “soylent green” which is

reprocessed, via modern industry, into cheap, easily immitatable commodities of no intrinsic value. In Barthes' words, "[plastic] is the first magical substance which consents to be prosaic" (98). This ethically charged observation—its moralism signaled by Barthes' implied "high-low" opposition between poetic vs. *merely* prosaic plastic-power, as well as between the *merely* telluric vs. more polished rendering of what he calls the crystalline "base-materiality" of "humanity"—nonetheless probingly points to the ways in which he sees subjects being made to "consent" to their own ideological entrapment.

But Barthes goes even further, constructing the bio-politics of human life itself as more and more resembling the production and reproduction of those plastics on display in the exhibit, such that "the hierarchy of substances is abolished: a single one has replaced them all: the whole world *can* be plasticized, and even life itself since, we are told, they are beginning to make plastic aortas" (99). The human heart—the choice of this particular organ is deployed here for optimum metaphorical, but also cultural-historical impact—has been rendered into a reproducible, plastic commodity. On the other hand, far from being a mere cheap imitation, such a plastic prosthetic can also be seen to *extend* human life, both biologically and conceptually—akin to potential cyborgian creative force of plasticity perhaps closer to what Hardt and Negri have in mind (particularly with their invocation of Donna Haraway's cyborg in *Empire* on page 218). And yet, Barthes' critique compels one to ask at what cost this reproduction and renewal of

life is given its repressive ideological modes and mechanisms which ‘magically’ disappear as a result of their normativizing biopolitical effects and procedures?

As a concept for thinking through the ethics, the politics, and the biopolitical mechanisms and procedures of identity production, Barthesian plasticity is clearly locatable within a Western modernist historical context. It arguably haunts Hardt and Negri’s project as a kind of lingering structuralist remainder in the form of a “base materiality” to which they must refer to ground their “totalizing” biopolitics of “social production” in Empire. As a spectral remainder haunting Hardt and Negri’s project, Barthesian plasticity lends a nuanced, if nostalgically moralistic critique of this production of “life” by and through Empire. For example, we might consider how Barthes’ model serves as an occasion for considering how his “crystallization” of the base materiality of humanity—which seems to have a “natural” moral state that pre-exists its “mythologized” ideological subjectivication (an a priori moral state belied by the very infinite semiotic structure of Barthes’ own schematization of myth as depicted in his diagram)—resembles the universalizing gesture of the multitude. While Hardt and Negri’s postmodern concept of biopolitics is less “material” and more “virtual” than Barthes’ mythological concept of ideology, and thus for them, is meant to operate more fluidly on a plane of “immanence,” I would argue that their idea of plasticity shares with that of Barthes a kind of latently humanistic “universalization” of human struggle against its “unnatural” alienation by ideological forces. To sketch out the problem in perhaps overly simplistic terms;

in order to “ontologize” the multitude as a *global* human collectivity, Hardt and Negri’s account requires a kind of crystallized “base-substance” of global human existence (or “History”) which serves as a totalizing *tabula rasa* of “the social” on which to schematize collective biopolitical struggle against Empire. Thus, while their “utopic/deconstructive” critique is meant to move beyond what they see as the binarisms and border struggles of postmodernism (*Empire* 183-90), a kind of modernist humanism and even a latent “materialism” (if in a mutated, virtualized form) seems to creep back into it. The effect is the occlusion of certain local specificities and singular struggles that are not reducible or ontologizable within the historically totalizing collectivity of the “multitude.” Indeed, *Empire* begins with the telling line: “Empire is *materializing* before our very eyes” (“Preface” xi; emphasis added). What can this mean, particularly given the authors’ insistence that biopolitical production is “the production of *social* life itself” (xiii; emphasis added), which adds a kind of universalizing logic of the “social” by which to order this *tabula rasa* of Empirical materiality that, for them, has “no practical outside”?

Where Hardt and Negri’s concept of plasticity differs from Barthes’ is that in *Empire*, plastic power is a function and operating principle of contemporary biopower, whereas for Barthes it implies a general reconsideration of the status of the biopolitical subject. Since the beginnings of the postmodernist movement, the subject is no longer understood to have access to a pre-ideological, unalienated individuality, but is riven through and through with power-dynamics, ideology,



culture, sociality, ethics—in short, the multiple, heterogeneous conceptual matrixes of intelligibility of the “human and its others.” Moreover, even the conceptual limits of “humanity” are increasingly contested as *the* anthropocentric “ground” for understanding what constitutes “livable life.”

Hardt and Negri excavate the term “biopower” from Michel Foucault, who is largely responsible for inaugurating the contemporary project of dismantling “the human,” understanding the category to be a set of scientifically, institutionally and nationally administered power-knowledges of control. While Foucault focuses much of his work on modern institutionality, however, Hardt and Negri reconceptualize biopower to figure what they understand to be contemporary ways in which Empire operates as a “society of control,” or, as Imre Szeman clarifies, “from the inside rather than the outside” (Brown and Szeman 178). The highest function of biopower, for Hardt and Negri, “is to invest life through and through, and its primary task is to administer life. Biopower thus refers to a situation in which what is directly at stake in power is the production and reproduction of life itself” (Empire 24). In other words, one key shift that Hardt and Negri argue has occurred from Foucauldian biopower to contemporary biopower in Empire is that the particular ways in which power once operated through (inter)national institutions and infrastructures no longer works the same way. Power, they say, is no longer *mediated* in these same modern institutional ways but is instead *immediate*, immanent and global. What they are getting at is the seeming *ubiquity* of Empire as—not an institution or set of

institutions per se, but—a kind of overriding global ideology which has become so pervasive that *everyone* is biopolitically operated on and shaped by it.

Everyone in the world, according to Hardt and Negri, is now in some way or another *immediately* subjectified by the logic of capitalism, irregardless of any mediating affiliation or citizenship. In their words, “Empire’s rule has no limits” (xiv)—by which they mean it has become a kind of God who is the Spirit of globalization.

The biopolitical production of subjectivity in Empire, for Hardt and Negri, has made a shift roughly analogous to the difference between the cyborg “Terminator” character in Arnold Schwarzenegger’s first Terminator movie—the mechanics, wires and chips clearly identifiable as implants in relation to the skin and bones of the half-human, half-cyborg killing machine—to the smooth liquidity of the more advanced Terminator model of the second film who, even when beaten literally to a puddle, merely reforms anew in any form it has come into contact with in order to quickly fit in to any environment in which it happens to be. The seemingly unmediated and immanent fluidity of the second Terminator is nonetheless in strict adherence to his most basic programming as Terminator/super-hitman in league with a machinic global Empire waging total war on humanity itself.

However, this conceptualization of the biopolitical internalization of the outside in Empire (Hardt and Negri 226) arguably signals a curious conflation of inside and outside which doesn’t actually dismantle this dualism. This

problematic arises in a couple of key ways in their project. For example, Hardt and Negri view the “totalizing social prowess of Empire” (10) as *nearly* but not *completely* totalizing. As they explain in *Empire*, “today, *nearly* all of humanity is to some degree absorbed within or subordinated to the networks of capitalist exploitation” (43; emphasis added). If Empire is largely (if not completely) capitalist-driven and biopolitically grounded, this “nearly” suggests a kind of human and/or biopolitical remainder that—as Slavoj Žižek says of the Schellingian “indivisible remainder”—is posited as interior and exterior to Empire all at the same time. Žižek, in *The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters*, unpacks Schelling’s contradictory-seeming idealist concept as describing

the kernel of unreadability that resists and belies every interpretative appropriation—that is, the very feature which makes a text forever “non-identical to itself,” the unappropriable foreign ingredient-body on account of which a text always eludes and defers its being-comprehended—is the ultimate guarantee of its identity; without this inassimilable kernel, the text would lack any proper consistency, it would be a transparent medium, a mere appearance of *another* essential identity. (26)

It is that which refuses interpretation and is inassimilable or radically contradictory in identity, in other words, that Žižek explains is the key to maintaining the coherence of the larger system of representation. Without such an indivisible remainder, the supplemental structure of such an identity would become apparent and in fact *divisible*. It is the “secret” of the indivisible remainder—the universal “truth” which is jealously guarded by the ruling power and revealed to individuals only in the form of divine surplus value, or as the gift

of death—that maintains the hegemonic superiority of such a law of subjectivity. Žižek goes on to offer an example of such a “contradictory kernel” at the core of contemporary being which almost directly maps on to Hardt and Negri’s subject of Empire.

Perhaps the supreme ideologico-political example of contradiction is provided by today’s religious and ethnic fundamentalisms which are emerging as a reaction to the withering-away of the Nation-State. The key fact of today’s world is the unheard-of expansion of capitalism, which is less and less bound by the form of the nation-State, capitalism’s hitherto fundamental unit of contraction, and asserts itself more and more in direct “transnational” form; the reaction to this boundless expansion which threatens to sweep away every particular self-identity are “postmodern” fundamentalisms as the violent “contraction” of social life into its religious-ethnic roots. Is not this contraction a kind of mocking imitation of the Schellingian primordial act of choosing one’s own eternal character? In rediscovering one’s ethnic roots or religious tradition (all of which, of course, are faked retroactive projections), a social group as it were chooses its eternal nature—that is, freely decides what it always-already was... (27)

The complex and contradictory dynamics of Žižek’s example resonate with the so-called “Jihad” invoked by Al Qaeda in the name of which the coordinated attacks on U.S. targets on September 11, 2001 were executed. The “transnational” coordination and religious elements of the terrorist attacks are in the name of a retroactive reclaiming of nationalist cultural, religious and racial roots—a “free choice,” against the onslaught of capitalist/Americanist globalization, to reclaim “eternal” religious and cultural identity. As Žižek points out, however, such religious fundamentalism is a “faked, retroactive projection” of universal identity, as the many condemnations by Muslim groups of Al Qaeda’s interpretation of “Jihad,” as well as the many evangelical Christian

condemnations of President Bush's characterization of the war on terror as a Christian religious "crusade" attest.

Such a remainder can be understood as one or more "local-ities" (and not necessarily spatial or geopolitical ones) that are in excess of Empire's totalizing reach. Hardt and Negri's assumption of the *near* totality of Empire's grasp over humanity and its global habitus leads them to argue that a

strategy of defending the local is damaging because it obscures and even negates the real alternatives and the potentials for liberation that exist *within* [emphasis their's] Empire. We should be done once and for all with the search for an outside, a standpoint that imagines a purity for our politics. It is better *both theoretically and practically* to enter the terrain of Empire and confront its homogenizing and heterogenizing flows in all their complexity, grounding our analysis in the power of the global multitude." (46; emphasis added)

If Hardt and Negri were to understand the "local" as a form of essentialist identity politics which uncritically dismisses the often "globally oriented" conditions of possibility for certain local contexts, then they would have a point. However, the above passage is contradictory in two key ways. First, it sets up an odd spatial relationship whereby the "local" is seen as outside and inside Empire all at once. And yet, focusing on the local is understood to be counter-productive to the real fight against Empire—an apparent contradiction (and perhaps a dismissal of local "evidence" of ethico-political struggles) if Empire is seen as implicating the entirety of the globe and thus local concerns are seen as *automatically* global ones. In short, simply *dismissing* "the local" in favour of a global approach is akin to a kind of myopic Althusserian "top-down" schematics of ideological control.

Second, there is a false dichotomy subtly inferred here between the “theoretical” and “practical” approaches to Empire that undermines the ways in which these approaches, rather than merely contradicting and complicating each other, instead subtend one another to the point of being indistinguishable. For instance, the “search for an outside” of Empire is construed here as an idealist or “purist” approach to both theory and politics. Hardt and Negri contend that “the local” should rather be interrogated for the ways in which globalization itself produces the *effect* of the local as a kind of containment and management strategy for reproducing global heterogeneity (*Empire*, 45). While a valid and well-argued point by a number of critics, such an approach as deployed here by Hardt and Negri is in danger of a “chicken-or-the-egg” paradox in which the singularity of any given locality is obfuscated by an all-consuming witchhunt for its nefarious “global” conditions of possibility. Put differently, by *undertheorizing* their “practical” approach to local concerns, Hardt and Negri miss the potential *impracticalities* of overlooking what is *actually local* about the local by viewing it as just another “example” of globalization’s totalizing reach. Moreover, the stated aim of Hardt and Negri’s book is to “take us through and beyond Empire” (xv), which, to state the problem too quickly, implies not only that Empire has a limit, but that Hardt and Negri are indeed searching for its “outside,” or the alterity beyond the finitude of Empire (a search which is perhaps part of the latent “deconstructive” side of their method).

These key contradictions beg the following questions: “Where does this alterity to Empire reside?” And if, to borrow Žižek’s reading of Schelling, this alterity is a kind of irreducible remainder within Empire itself, then: “Why are Empire’s excessive remainders not ‘practical’ considerations for the struggle mounted by the multitude against Empire?”

Such questions complicate and contradict the multitude’s seeming ontological closure (as a kind of equally totalizing contestatory “double” of Empire itself), which otherwise suffers, first, from purportedly speaking for everyone, and, second, from its inevitable negation of those absolute others who fall outside the multitude’s totalizing, ontological limits. Much like my Terminator example, many critics argue that this fluid subjectivity of the multitude is more akin to fiction than the plights and problems of actual local subjectivities, events and individual struggles it is meant to represent on a globalized level.<sup>42</sup>

Such criticisms can also be read as carrying out the very (deconstructive) critical work that the multitude’s aporetic structure was meant to incite. As a kind of methodological lever set on “auto-deconstruct,” the multitude is designed to stand in for the swirling mass of supplemental desires that both feed the productive machinery that keeps Empire going—in fact *is* Empire in one sense—

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<sup>42</sup> For some particularly compelling examples of this basic critique of how the concept of the multitude tends to obfuscate and even misrepresent the complexities of contemporary global politics, see the collection of essays in Paul A. Passavant and Jodi Dean’s *Empire’s New Clothes: Reading Hardt and Negri* (New York: Routledge, 2004). Also see Crystal Bartolovich’s essay “Post-Imperialism or New Imperialism? The Eleventh of September of George Bush: Fortress U.S. and the Global Politics of Consumption,” *Interventions* 5.2 (2003): 177-99.

and which, conversely, must be managed and contained through such totalizing gestures as “the multitude.” Therefore, a critique of the impossible possibility of a unified multitude serves also as a demonstration of Empire’s ultimate inability to contain the “world” within a totalizing, ethico-political concept of the “right,” or “global democracy”—equally empty, yet universalizing signifiers that would have done Hegel proud.

We have to read for this self-reflexive remainder within the multitude—it’s there, but buried beneath an ontological shell and more complex than one expects. In order to encourage such an archaeological reading practice, Hardt and Negri’s text is set up in such a way that, as a more “ethical” embodiment of Empire, the multitude already contains and cleverly draws attention to its own finitude as a method or political strategy. Its ultimate purpose is to work through to its own end, and thus to the end of Empire. In this way, the dead (those universalized subjectivities of Empire) are given the “theoretical” tools to bury the dead and thus to performatively resurrect themselves anew. In my view, that is the reason Hardt and Negri make the multitude out of plastic, so that its mould can be more easily broken. The plasticity of the multitude thus evokes another strategic prostheticization of power, the specter of Nietzschean *plastic power*.

### *Nietzsche’s Plastic Prosthetics of History*

Nietzsche coins his term “plastic power” in “The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life” as part of his approach to conceptualizing national citizenship



and historical memory. Nietzschean plastic power, like Barthes' and Hardt and Negri's, is also explicitly concerned with how "life" is administered. Hardt and Negri's suggestion that the stakes of the multitude is "life itself" (*Empire* 24) seems like an insupportable, essentializing gesture. Yet, read in and through Nietzschean "plastic power," their outwardly "utopic" claim can be read as much more internally contested and self-reflexive than it seems. Indeed, what really seems to be compelled by such a fantastic statement is a closer attention to the limits and conditions of "life" as demarcated by "globalization/Empire" as the hegemonic contemporary sovereign exception over a certain idealized, global form of "livable life." But for whom, by whom, and in whose interests is such a life lived?

"Life," as deployed in Hardt and Negri's text, is haunted by Nietzsche's concept of life which hinges on a pre-deconstructive, de-ontologizing critique of history. Life, in Nietzsche's essay, works in one sense as a metaphor for the health of German society, as well as for the living "flow" of its history. Both these meanings are inferred in the following line from the opening paragraph of the "Forward":

We want to serve history only to the extent that history serves life: for it is possible to value the study of history to such a degree that life becomes stunted and degenerate—a phenomenon we are now forced to acknowledge, painful though this may be, in the face of certain striking symptoms of our age. (59)

The metaphors of “stuntedness,” “degeneracy,” “pain,” and “symptoms”—all medical terms relating to the health of the corporeal body—are used here to describe the state of Germany as a *social body* at this point in its history. Germany’s ill health, Nietzsche infers, will eventually lead to the death of the individual Germans’ sense of who they are as citizens and of the larger German social body. Life, for Nietzsche, thus also contains clear ethical resonances which suggest that the path Nietzsche saw Germany taking as a collective social body (in part via Hegel) was the wrong one, particularly according to its own ethico-political standards. However, Nietzsche’s metaphorical rendering of ethics denies it any transcendental moral “content.” For example, he turns his onto-biological metaphors of life against itself by contending that the only way to heal and maintain the life of the German social body from the deadening effects of historical knowledge (read: biopower/knowledge in the turbocapitalist context) is through the most inorganic, “plasticized” intervention of unhistorical forgetfulness—*plastic power*.

Plastic power, Nietzsche says, is “the capacity to develop out of oneself in one’s own way, to transform and incorporate into oneself what is past and foreign, to heal wounds, to replace what has been lost, to recreate broken moulds” (Nietzsche 62). For Nietzsche, then, a knowledge of history as a natural, teleological progress towards its end is akin to death. Life, on the other hand, is a perpetual “becoming” that nonetheless entails an ongoing process of singularly delimiting a particular historical horizon of beingness. This involves a “necessary

forgetting” of everything else *but* this particular—if artificial—ontological concept of one’s own life. Anything less means getting swept away and drowned in the swift current of history along with one’s singular identity. As such, Nietzsche conceptualizes history and identity (especially national identity) as myth or fable fashioned from the infinite stream of living possibilities. Not to delimit such a horizon of one’s being in the world is to weaken one’s grip on identity and indeed on one’s effective “reality.”

Similarly, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri understand contemporary globalization to be suicidally afflicted with the ill effects of its over weaning biopolitical framework of Empire. Unlike Nietzsche, however, they see the creative potential of plasticized identity working on a *post-national*, globalized level. Plasticity, for them, suggests a necessary forgetting of all but singular desires by individual subjects. Yet on the basis of these singular productions of individuality which are in common with many others, Hardt and Negri seek to collectivize this multitude, staging it as a “schizoanalytic” mimicry of Empirical subjectivity. Schizoanalysis is Deleuze and Guattari’s term for a “mad” (after Nietzsche’s madman) and “forgetful” remembering/reproducing of oedipal codes in individual socio-capitalist subject production and is, I would suggest for me, a direct theoretical precursor to Hardt and Negri’s project. In this and other ways, the multitude *is* Empire which is thus, for them, both the problem and the main source of possible solutions for globalization’s suicidal social ills.

To borrow Nietzsche's medical metaphor, what Hardt and Negri seek to do is to amputate Empire's infected limbs—the inexhaustible drive of global capitalism to consume the entire world in its wake—and replace them with the more malleable and obviously manufactured plastic prosthetics of the multitude. In this way, Empire can hopefully extend its own life by growing past its current “defective” late-capitalist stage of development before it exhausts itself and dies. This, hope Hardt and Negri, will allow it to eventually pass away in a less traumatic and sociopathic way than those immanent “worst”-case scenarios which face globalization and which a certain concept of “globalization” has produced—scenarios that include the slow waning of the environment, mushroom clouds and/or catastrophic “clashes of civilizations.”

Much like Nietzsche, therefore, Hardt and Negri seem to employ plasticity as part of the multitude's deconstructive habit of strategic “necessary forgetfulness.” Such a habit works to underwrite their project's “ontology,” allowing them to strategically deploy blatantly utopic politics which the more deconstructive elements of their project undermine by refusing the very categories of “ontology” and “utopia” as such. As they explain,

with this passage [to Empire], the deconstructive phase of critical thought, which from Heidegger and Adorno to Derrida provided a powerful instrument for the exit from modernity, has lost its effectiveness. It is now a closed parenthesis and leaves us faced with a new task: constructing, in the non-place, a new place; constructing ontologically new determinations of the human, of living – a powerful [post-human] artificiality of being. Donna Haraway's cyborg fable, which resides at the ambiguous boundary between human, animal, and machine, introduces us today, much more effectively than deconstruction, to these new terrains of possibility – but we should remember that this is a fable and nothing more. The force that

must instead drive forward theoretical practice to actualize these terrains of potential metamorphosis is still (and ever more intensely) the common experience of the new productive practices and the concentration of productive labor on *the plastic and fluid terrain* of the new communicative, biological, and mechanical technologies. (*Empire* 217-18; emphasis added)

This passage outlines what Hardt and Negri see as a shift in critical thought from a post-Heideggerian, “deconstructive/postmodern” phase which, for them, has lost effectiveness due to over-successfully deconstructing the borders and boundaries of modernist concepts, myths, fables, institutions and epistemological structures. In the wake of this perceived “ontological vacuum,” contemporary Empire, Hardt and Negri argue, is characterized by a “plastic and fluid terrain” of globalized technologies, virtual network structures and subjectivities which they understand to be *immune* to deconstructive critique.

However, such an assessment raise the question: how does Hardt and Negri’s theory of biopolitics invalidate or even not resemble the force of a *de-con*-structive critique? In fact, the specter of deconstruction is invoked here by the (perhaps strategic) spectral force of its negation. It is also invoked by the ungrounding effect of Hardt and Negri’s biopolitics of the “post-human” in this passage and the fluidity with which their conceptualization of the subject of the multitude of Empire breaches the conceptual borders of animality, humanity, machinery, virtuality, and other normativizing effects of “life” in the context of Empire. What they mistake for a fetishization of “borders” and “binaries” in certain deconstructive strains of criticism, such as Derrida’s, is perhaps more accurately an ethical concern for what constitutes the conditions of possibility for

politics—among multiple, heterogenous other modes of “being”—as well as for the possible radical alterity which is necessarily excluded from political identity as such, from “ontology,” as well as from totalizing systems of thought in general—including “deconstruction.”

From a methodological perspective, the (quasi-)ontologizing *plastic* force of the multitude, like Nietzsche’s concept of history, is really a kind of temporary necessary forgetting (perhaps of its more rigorous deconstructive function?) in order to “creatively” imagine alternative realities to Empire. The multitude’s underlying goal is not really a goal at all per se, but an always “becoming” or moving past the multitude—itsself a strategic spectral “double” of Empire—and its “deadening” ontological forms. As Hardt and Negri clarify at the end of the above passage from *Empire*, “the multitude, in its will to be-against and its desire for liberation, must push through Empire to come out the other side” (218). This “liberatory” discourse spectrally resonates in and through Nietzsche’s genealogical critique of historical progress as a kind of *will-to-(plastic-)power*, as well as in and through Foucault’s critique of liberation as a “dark, shimmering mirage” produced by and contained within the very discursive apparatus it was supposedly meant to escape from (*Discipline and Punish* 157). Plasticity, however, seems to afford the multitude’s “liberatory” discourse a certain suicidal self-reflexivity, or “auto-deconstruct” mechanism by which Foucault’s very warning is cleverly incorporated into Hardt and Negri’s two-handed (utopic *and* deconstructive) methodology.

Further, as spectrally related critiques of power, both Foucault and Nietzsche etymologically link the multitude to Hegel's master-slave dialectic, still the most resounding modern critique of power and universality to which the western global imaginary of Empire is but a footnote. The hauntological insistence of these intertextual, spectral remainders cracks open the ontological exterior of the multitude/Empire from the inside, flooding it with a deconstructive self-reflexivity that points more towards a reading of the multitude as a kind of dangerous, strategic supplementarity than a "beingness" of anything.

The specters of plasticity in Empire—both its Barthesian and Nietzschean strains—thus act as productive methodological hinges through and against which to read Hardt and Negri's terms, revealing them to contain complex, irreducible supplementarity which undermines any utopic, ontological "depth" that their more utopic elements might imply. But again, we have to – and are seemingly *encouraged* to – read for this conceptual dissonance as a function of the spectral payload that the multitude's terms carry with them--just as with Nietzsche. His writing also metaphorically enacts its argument, yet with the effect of destroying itself from within. And that is because, as he demonstrates, the price of intelligibility is the necessity of communicating through flawed, finite language and/or aesthetics. To paraphrase Nietzsche, in order to tell the truth, one must give oneself over to the fact that we are always already caught up in the inaugural lie of "language" which is the very condition of possibility for "truth." Perhaps Hardt and Negri, then, in a kind of homage to Nietzsche, have planted a stick of

dynamite called the multitude behind a bush for those of us caught up in Empire to cleverly discover. Such strategic explosions—or constructive destructions of presupposed knowledge about global “realities”—however, are perhaps much preferable to some of the “worst” possible future(s), or “mushroom clouds” to come if Empire is left to self-destruct without such critical interventions.

### *Specters of Singularity*

Two other competing specters of the ethical subject of Empire invoked in Hardt and Negri’s concept of the multitude are Giorgio Agamben’s and Jean-Luc Nancy’s theories of *singularity*. Hardt and Negri specify that “the multitude is composed of a set of *singularities* – and by singularity here we mean a social subject whose difference cannot be reduced to sameness, a difference that remains different. The component parts of the people [“the people” of the older modernist national model] are indifferent in their unity; they become an identity by negating or setting aside their differences. The plural singularities of the multitude thus stand in contrast to the undifferentiated unity of the people” (99). The spectral remainder of Jean-Luc Nancy’s concept of singularity haunts this passage, but in a distorted, or hauntologically “exorc-analyzed” way. That is partly because Hardt’s and Negri’s term also invokes Giorgio Agamben’s concept of singularity which he lays out in *The Coming Community* (1993), a book translated by Michael Hardt and obviously in dialogue with Nancy’s project.



For Nancy, singularity represents the beingness of a non-subject who lacks identity or identifiable community. A community of singularities, for him, is thus accurately a kind of immanent being-in-common that comes about despite one's existence receding from any essence of politics or community. In *The Inoperative Community*, Nancy proposes that "the thinking of community as essence – is in effect the closure of the political. Such a thinking constitutes closure because it assigns to community a *common being*, whereas community is a matter of something quite different, namely, of existence inasmuch as it is *in common*, but without letting itself be absorbed into a common substance" (xxxviii). In Nancy's relentless pursuit of what he sees as the immanent themes that doggedly haunt philosophy such as "freedom" and "community," he exhausts these terms, enacting a kind of framing of the political that denies any infinite essence to politics. In Christopher Fynsk's words, "Nancy is attempting to expose what still speaks in a term like 'community' when we assume the closure of the metaphysics of subjectivity – any communion of the subject with itself, any accomplished self-presence – and with it the closure of representation or signification... He is trying to work a thought of difference, or a thought of finitude, into political terms that continue to speak to us as imperatives despite their loss of philosophical meaning" (*Inoperative Community*, Foreword, xi). In his book *The Experience of Freedom*, Nancy explains that "freedom" is *existence*, which "signifies simply the freedom of being, that is, *the infinite inessentiality of its being-finite, which delivers it to the singularity wherein it is*

‘*itself*’” (14). Thus, far from President Bush’s universalist notion of freedom which implies an infinite and *definite* human subject of freedom, Hardt’s and Negri’s invocation of Nancy’s equally all-encompassing notion of freedom nonetheless denies essences or a defined political existence with which to map (and thereby contain and manage) human subjectivity.

But this is not quite Hardt’s and Negri’s usage of the term singularity, even though the specter of Nancy’s concept is certainly invoked and put into dialogue with their more ontological, utopic concept of the multitude. And Hardt’s and Negri’s term is certainly meant to be in the *spirit* of Nancy’s quasi-Marxist political critique of state politics. Much closer to Hardt and Negri, however, is Giorgio Agamben’s (re)thinking of Nancy’s concept of singularity in *The Coming Community*.

While Nancy sees the realization of being-in-common only in the “ecstatic” moments of loss (of community), death or birth—moments that, for him, come closest to articulating the inarticulability of singularity—Giorgio Agamben rethinks singularity in what Antonio Negri describes in his essay “The Ripe Fruit of Redemption” as more “positivist,” ontological and strategically utopic terms (n.p.). Similarly to Nancy’s concept, Agamben views singularity as “neither apathy nor promiscuity nor resignation. These pure singularities communicate only in the empty space of the example, without being tied by any common property, by any identity. They are expropriated of all identity, so as to appropriate belonging itself” (10-11). What is slightly different here from

Nancy's project is the strategic force of the linguistic "example," which, for Agamben, holds the political potential for resistant utopic politics. In and through the example, singularity becomes "whatever singularity, which wants to appropriate belonging itself, its own being-in-language, and thus rejects all identity and every condition of belonging, [and] is [therefore] the principal enemy of the State. Wherever these singularities peacefully demonstrate their being in common there will be a Tiananmen, and sooner or later, the tanks will appear" (87). Whatever being – simply, the thing with *all* its properties, none of which, however, constituting difference (Agamben 19) – seeks to reclaim a politics of being-in-common without actually "being" anything through the strategic linguistic ontology of the example. The example is thus the banner, or "multitude," under which these singularities-in-common can congregate *against* the state's sovereign exception over political association and over its ontological demarcation of what counts and doesn't count as viable human life itself.

A nagging question, however: to what extent is it possible to hypostatize a "linguistic" example that—in its a-historical firmness as a concept—doesn't fall prey to essentialism/empty generality? Does such a linguistic ontology not rely on some kind of reified dualism, such as the linguistic vs. the pre-linguistic, the linguistic vs. what is *essentially* singular or "bare life," or perhaps even the linguistic vs. the material? This problem of working out what exactly is being evoked as the necessary orienting oppositional term to "linguistic ontology" arises in Agamben's suggestion that "the camp is the *nomos* of modernity," an assertion

that Marc Redfield points out finds its major shortcoming in “its overhasty absolutization of its own terms” (10). Redfield argues that

Agamben rightly draws attention to the twentieth-century proliferation of ‘camps’ throughout civic space, and rightly suggests that the camp, as the space of an absolute impossibility of deciding between fact and law, rule and application, exception and rule’, arguably provides ‘the hidden matrix of the politics in which we are still living’. At the same time he fails to note an important double corollary: first, that *there is no such thing as an absolute camp*—even Auschwitz was exposed to systems and pressures larger than itself—and, second, that there is, therefore, no single homogeneous space called *camp* to which the various examples listed [in Agamben’s book] can be assimilated without residue. [...] The claim that in a late-twentieth-century European refugee camp the police ‘temporarily act as sovereign’ is valid, but only and precisely to the extent that one understands sovereign power as fractured, contaminated, and mediated. (10-12)

Thus, while the paradigm of “the camp”—such as Auschwitz—can be understood as a key model after which contemporary sovereignty is operating, no “camp” is pure, or “essentially” a camp, nor does it exist in a vacuum in- and for-itself. Furthermore, each camp-like paradigm of contemporary sovereignty can be understood, at best, to be a spectral supplement of the more general “spirit” of the camp Agamben is holding up as universal linguistic example. Thus, the “camp” can be understood to be re-inaugurated and spectrally deformed anew with each multiple, heterogeneous instance of the so-called universal paradigm, all such specters thus collectively making up the “spirit” for which there *is* no originary, pre-supplemental “camp” to refer back to. Likewise, the multitude, as a kind of linguistic ontological banner—much like Agamben’s example of the camp—falls prey to its very performative utterances which belie its supposed universal applicability to global political struggle, as well as the existence of any unifying

“spirit” of the multitude as such. Yet again, this performative auto-deconstruction of itself is arguably the multitude’s ethico-political function. The question remains, however, to what extent is this a *productive* feature of the multitude, and to what extent does it function merely to obfuscate the more urgent political issues at hand in any given context to which it might be applied?

Armed with Redfield’s observations, I posed a question to Antonio Negri in a graduate seminar he gave at McMaster University in April, 2006. I asked him whether he felt that given the obvious debt owed by his concept of the multitude to Agamben’s concepts “singularity” and “linguistic ontology,” his own project might fall prey to the same type of “linguistic essentialism” of which Redfield accuses Agamben’s concept of the “camp.” With my question, I was trying to draw a link between Agamben’s “camp” and the most common criticism of the multitude—that it tends to globalize a social concept of struggle against Empire yet occludes the singular “localized” struggles of the multitude’s constituents. Tellingly, Negri didn’t directly answer my question, but instead distanced himself from Agamben—a theorist he highly praises elsewhere precisely for his “linguistic ontological” approach. Negri in particular took issue with what he saw as Agamben’s theoretical abstraction, which Negri said suffered from a lack of grounding in “history.” Ironically, it is on the very basis of a

perceived theoretical “abstraction” divorced from historical specificity that many critics attack the multitude.<sup>43</sup>

If the ontological example of the multitude is, via its Agambenian remainders, always already *coming* as a result of the hypostatized totality of Empire to haunt it and expose its conceptual finitude, the conditions making this quasi-messianic “coming” possible include the way in which the multitude (and by implication Empire itself) is likewise always already *be-coming* something else—perhaps as a residual effect of its Nietzschean remainder of plasticity. However, the tensions and torsions at work within Hardt and Negri’s terms, often to the point of exhausting them, are part of the strategy of their utopic-deconstructive method. Thus, if the conceptual problems with Agambenian singularity and linguistic ontology haunt the multitude’s own strained finitude, its Nancyan remainder reminds us that perhaps Hardt and Negri meant to create such tensions within the multitude all along.

### *Post-9/11 Performativity in Empire*

What are the particular modes in which this biopolitical *becoming* of the subject of Empire/multitude occurs? Hardt and Negri attempt to answer this question, in part, by invoking yet another irreducible spectral remainder: Butlerian

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<sup>43</sup> See, for example, many of the articles collected in Paul Passavant and Jodi Dean’s *The Empire’s New Clothes: Reading Hardt and Negri* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

performativity. In *Multitude*, they suggest that the postmodern transition of the social subject into the subjectivity of the multitude can be summarized

in the conceptual shift from habit to performance as the core notion of the production of the common. [Judith Butler] develops clearly the performative processes of constitution [...with her concept of] queer politics[, which] is an excellent example of such a performative collective project of rebellion and creation. It is not really an affirmation of homosexual identities but a subversion of the logics of identity in general. (199-200)

Thus, with a typically incorporating move, Hardt and Negri recruit Butlerian performativity—a concept that by 2004 and the publication of her book *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, is built upon by Butler in order to reconsider the limits of ethical human community and to advocate for a much slower, more self-reflexive reconsideration of the normativizing and exclusionary effects of the dominant discourses of “humanity” and mourning work than Hardt and Negri’s preoccupation with (western) “social life” can arguably accommodate.

As with the other specters haunting their project, Butlerian performativity arguably isn’t forcibly refashioned to fit into their system, but is kept irreducibly open—in part due to their deceptively “thin” unpacking of her term. Butlerian performativity, in other words, isn’t really rethought or even critiqued by them, as much as it is invoked as a kind of “example” supposedly confirming their claims, yet which is actually in excess of and even in contradiction with them in intriguing ways.

This conceptual excess is apparent in the above passage, for example, in the slippage between Hardt and Negri's use of the term "performance" and the quite different concept of "performativity" argued for by Butler. This slippage perhaps signals a less than obvious attempt to *reconceptualize* performativity buried in Hardt and Negri's seemingly "direct" invocation of Butler's term as unproblematic example of their theory. This subtle reconceptualization of the performative re-casts it as a form of *creative* subjective agency operating along the lines of the plane of immanence—a creative mode of biopolitical production which, insist Hardt and Negri, is centered on the "social."

This concept of subjective agency, however, seems out of step with Butler's critique of social constructivism in *Bodies that Matter* (1993). In that book, she throws into question the way in which this type of political critique often presupposes a form/matter distinction which, she says, falls prey to one of two basic untenable positions. Taking the gendered body as her example, she points out that first, this type of critique can lead to a view of the body as essentially "sexed" which the language of gender need only discover, classify, and/or defend. Second, it can lead to an equally untenable linguistic monism whose biopolitics is centred solely on the "social discursive," and whose "nominative subjects [are] endowed with the power of self-causation and [seen in anthropocentric terms as] causing everything else" (Pheng Cheah 108).

This very form/matter dualism deconstructed by Butler slips inconspicuously back into Hardt and Negri's *linguistic* ontology of the multitude



which, they insist, is concerned primarily with “the social.” For them, the biopolitical production of life in Empire is no longer mediated, but is instead *immediate* and *immanent*. In other words, Empire and/as the multitude supposedly creates new ontological effects of subjectivity and materiality through the pure, unmediated integration of singular wills (in common) with *immanent* ontological and subjective outcomes via the virtual network structures of globalization/Empire. Yet, such a model, taken to its limits, arguably merely collapses the social into the material/virtual, creating a kind of desert-like hyper-reality without really overcoming this socio-linguistic/base-material dualism. This thus raises the question, are there other “non-social” modes of biopolitical production at work producing subjectivity in “Empire” left unaccounted for and/or foreclosed by such a socio-linguistic/materialist dualism? Is their privileging in *Empire* of the “social” turn it into something like a euphemism for the “linguistic” (of which “virtuality” merely becomes a variant form in Hardt and Negri’s project) which Butler was taking issue with in her strategic deployment of the “material” in *Bodies that Matter* as another possible mode of performative subject formation?

One intended effect of Butler’s “reformulation of the materiality of bodies” (2) and indeed of materiality—as not merely a binaristic term in opposition to the “linguistic,” but as “the effect of a dynamic of power” (2)—is her uncovering of some slower, sedimented ways in which the biopolitical production of subjectivity takes place. The “material body,” argues Butler, is not

so easily changed and/or historically redefined (as is, for example, Hardt and Negri's more "virtual" concept of the human) but instead is formed through "a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter" (9-10).<sup>44</sup> One consequence of Butler's insights on Hardt and Negri's mass political project is to throw into question the "en massification" of *socio*-political struggle—indeed, many struggles being locatable in the differential needs and stresses of the singular, non-universalizable *physical bodies* of those oppressed, hungry, tortured, or sickened for specific reasons and in specific contexts.<sup>45</sup> Such struggles are clearly irreducible amongst the global masses of singular individuals in infinitely differential physical and virtual localities of "Empire."

Hardt and Negri's concept of Empire, in spite of what they see as the "internalization of its exterior," arguably tends to produce a kind of "flat" surface of "the social"—what they call a "smooth world" (*Empire* xiii)—which nonetheless stands in for, and in a certain way calls forth, the "material" as the *ground* or *tabula rasa* of human existence against which it orients its supposedly "fluid" and im-mediate affective discursive properties and "ontologized" forms. Hardt and Negri acknowledge this to a certain extent with their qualification that

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<sup>44</sup> That said, such sudden traumatic shifts are possible, for example, in the nearly overnight depopulation of Rwanda during the 1994 genocide campaign aimed at Tutsis and moderate Hutus when approximately 800,000 or more people were exterminated.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Daniel Fischlin and Martha Nandorfy's recent book *The Concise Guide to Global Human Rights* (Montreal: Black Rose, 2007). Their rethinking of International Human Rights laws and legislation points out its ethical shortcomings precisely along these lines, as a lack of regard for the *physical bodies* and necessary environmental conditions necessary for sustaining

Empire (and/as global capitalism) is *nearly* totalizing—it can’t accommodate and/or contain *all* singularity. Thus, much like the indivisible remainder which Žižek identifies at the core of Schelling’s idealist system, a similar “indivisible remainder” of unaccountable singularity is arguably the very secret, ungraspable element that Empire must incorporate—indeed produce—within its very system in order to keep itself from unraveling. What’s more, Hardt and Negri’s concept of the social resembles a western anthropocentric term indelibly tied to an equally western biopolitics of the human, as the theoretical apparatus they are drawing from indicates.<sup>46</sup> The limits and exclusions of “the human” are thus also limits and exclusions of sociality in Empire. To put this in blunt terms, the biopolitical struggles which caused the de-humanization and deaths of over 800,000 Rwandans can hardly be equated on the level of “social production” such that a “global trade union” would have spoken to the common concerns of those singularities caught in that specific crisis. Thus, it is doubtful whether everyone is really affected by Empire, and if so, whether they are affected in similar ways, to the extent that all these singular concerns can be productively collectivized as “the multitude.” From the opposite direction, it seems that the mass exportation of “freedom” and “democracy” abroad as conceived of by the current Bush administration as a tactic for fighting a “global war on terror” does not really

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these bodies by often self-interested national and international institutions administering rights and freedoms.

<sup>46</sup> This point has been raised by numerous African and Latin American scholars, including a number of participants in attendance at a panel on Hardt and Negri’s book *Empire* in which I participated at the 5<sup>th</sup> International Gala Rethinking Marxism Conference in Amherst, Connecticut, in November 2003.

speak to the most important crises facing “the globe” right now. Thus, *Empire* does not appear sufficiently “globalized.”

In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler identifies a danger in approaching the politics of subjectivity in too hasty or un-self-reflexive a manner: the possibility of normativizing one’s own “utopic” terms. Again, taking feminism as her example, she argues that “the genealogical critique of the queer subject will be central to queer politics to the extent that it constitutes a self-critical dimension within activism, a persistent reminder to take the time to consider the exclusionary force of one of activism’s most treasured contemporary premises” (227). The same caution can be leveled against the multitude whose strategy of “globalizing” its own struggle tends to elide the specificities of any given “local” struggle it supposedly stands in for, and also tends to “westernize” all such struggles as a result of Hardt and Negri’s particular philosophical approach. For example, they emphasize in *Empire* that they “use ‘Empire’ [...] not as a *metaphor*, which would require demonstration of the resemblances between today’s world order and the Empires of Rome, China, the Americas, and so forth, but rather as a *concept*, which calls primarily for a theoretical approach” (xiv). Only two pages later, however, they describe their approach as “broadly interdisciplinary,” their argument claiming “to be equally philosophical and historical, cultural and economic, political and anthropological” (xvi). This suggests a kind of historico-cultural, politico-economic grounding to their Western/Euro-Romanically oriented “theory” whose “concepts” thus present

themselves as being more assuredly *reflective* of current “realities” than *self-reflective* about the conditions of possibility underlying such a universalizing “theory” of global history. Indeed, an underlying approach to “theory” as merely a serviceable abstraction for apprehending what’s otherwise “real” and “important”—a charge not applicable to the entirety of either Hardt or Negri’s oeuvres—is signaled in their stated aim for the book of providing “a general theoretical framework and a *toolbox of concepts* for theorizing and acting in and against Empire” (xvi; emphasis added).

On the other hand, such a cautionary self-critique as Butler argues for in *Bodies that Matter* is invoked by Hardt and Negri via their spectral invocation of Butlerian performativity. For example, one case study looking at the relevance of *Empire* for African countries<sup>47</sup> throws into question the multitude’s “global” relevance as a totalizing organization of collective struggle in lieu of rigorous, detailed analyses of the actual and irreducible complexities of any given site in which “globalization” is performatively playing out. However, one could argue that the very concept of the multitude—as a kind of counter-term which is also *synonymous* with Empire—is making just such a critique by performatively demonstrating the finitude of Empire (and/as the multitude) as a totalizing economic paradigm for biopolitically organizing everyone in the world.

Moreover, the excesses and dissonances separating Butlerian performativity from the biopolitical performativity of the multitude are mediated

by another Specter of that concept: Derrida's directive in *Specters of Marx* to take responsibility for "committing oneself in a performative fashion" (50). For Derrida, this seems to involve a complex approach to self-fashioning the possible future(s) to come of democracy and the new International via quasi-utopic "promises." Such promises, made in "good faith"—meaning, faithful in their intention of being kept (if impossible as pre-determined outcomes)—are nonetheless subject to the possible future(s) to come of their performative playing out. The "end results" of such promises are thus unforeseeable in advance. That said, utopic politics *must* be taken seriously, says Derrida in *Specters of Marx*, to the extent that

a promise must promise to be kept, that is, not to remain 'spiritual' or 'abstract,' but to produce events, new effective forms of action, practice, organization, and so forth. To break with the 'party form' or with some form of the State or the International does not mean to give up every form of practical or effective organization. (89)

A promise promised, yet unfulfilled, in other words, does not necessarily constitute "bad faith," but merely an accession to the "spectral" conditions of possibility for holding to the "spirit"—if not to the letter—of such a promise. Thus, "utopic" ethico-political organizations, if they are to be effective, Derrida suggests, must commit themselves *performatively*, meaning seriously as laws to follow, yet "justly" and adaptable to the *differences*, alterities and excesses produced by, through, and/or unforeseeably interrupting the application of such laws. Thus "non-citizenship"—as a possible Specter of the multitude to come—

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<sup>47</sup> See Kevin C. Dunn's "Africa's Ambiguous Relation to Empire and *Empire*." In *Empire's New*

in a performative sense, is perhaps much less “abstract” or “intangible” than a more solidified-sounding political program that adheres too closely to its own utopic shape and thus, in its ignoring of the day-to-day realities of its playing out, resembles no one. In “We Refugees,” Giorgio Agamben formulates this very problematic in the context of the “stateless citizen.” As he points out,

that there is no autonomous space within the political order of the nation-state for something like the pure man in himself is evident at least in the fact that, even in the best of cases, the status of the refugee is always considered a temporary condition that should lead either to naturalization or to repatriation. A permanent status of man in himself is inconceivable for the law of the nation-state. (3)

The consequences of this are that “rights”—as well as the limits and exclusions inherent in “human rights”—are inextricable from “citizenship.” Thus, in many cases, it is in the interests of the singular individual *not* to submit to citizenship, if non-citizenship constitutes a radical opening to other possible forms of livable human life than can be accommodated by a particular law of citizenship. Likewise, the multitude—as a strategically “utopic,” globalized political movement—according to Hardt and Negri, most resembles the western legal rights associated with membership in a “global trade union,” and therefore is still tied in part to state citizenship for its imagining of human rights and freedoms. Jacques Derrida avoids such pitfalls by distancing himself from the “utopic,”<sup>48</sup>

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*Clothes*. Eds. Paul A. Passavant and Jodi Dean. New York: Routledge, 2004. 143-62.

<sup>48</sup> In interview material in Jacques Derrida and Thomas Assheuer’s “Intellectual Courage: An Interview by Thomas Assheuer” (*Culture Machine* 2 [2000], 20 Oct. 2000. <[http://culturemachine.Tees.ac.uk/frm\\_f1.htm](http://culturemachine.Tees.ac.uk/frm_f1.htm)>), Derrida states that “although there is a radical potential in utopia which one should no doubt never completely renounce, above all when one can turn it into a motif of resistance against all alibis and all ‘realist’ and ‘pragmatist’ resignations, I still mistrust the word. In certain contexts, utopia, the word in any case, is all too easily associated with the dream, with

even while embracing it as a spectral concept always performatively becoming something other than what it otherwise might “present” itself as “being.”

Indeed, there are a number of clear linkages between Hardt and Negri’s understanding of the “creatively” utopic plane of immanence on which they see the multitude operating, and a deconstructive concept of performative subjectivity—especially Butler’s. First, both Butler’s and Hardt and Negri’s models of performativity are firmly grounded in rethinkings of Foucauldian biopower as well as in their post-Foucauldian preoccupations with the limits, prohibitions, and specific procedures involved in various biopolitical productions of “the human.” Second, both locate a measure of subjective “agency” in the ways in which the hegemonic laws and power dynamics of a given epistemological system, such as Empire, are understood as *coextensive* with its subjects, and as such are inaugurated anew with each imperfect, singular utterance (or spectral “performance”) of the subjectivizing law. For Hardt and Negri, this coextensivity is formalized in their (nearly) totalizing concept of unmediated immanence in Empire. Third, these two spectrally-linked theories—Hardt and Negri’s and Butler’s—both attend to the ways in which the normative law’s (e.g. Empire’s) biopolitical containment and management strategies guarantee that, when theorizing possible modes and strategies of subjective agency, trust in that

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demobilisation, with an impossibility that urges renouncement instead of action. The ‘impossible’ of which I often speak is not the utopian, on the contrary it lends its own motion to desire, to action and to decision, it is the very figure of the real. It has duration, proximity, urgency” (Derrida and Assheuer 27).



the mystical transformative “nature” of subjective performativity as somehow inevitably leading to political change is insufficient.

For Hardt, Negri and Butler, agency *must* involve some form of collective political activity, be this a stubborn—if rigorously self-reflexive—attachment to “identity,” or mass global political activism. This is a particularly important point given the radically imbalanced power dynamics of contemporary “global” humanity and the over weaning ethico-political, economic, juridical, and militarized forces of law at play in the war on terror’s current reshaping of the very limits and livable conditions of the “global human.” These forces tend to normativize a *particular* global ideal of who counts as preferred human subject and as a result render other non-identical forms of human life unlivable.

*Butler, Biopower and the Agambenian Sovereign Exception*

Butler makes this point in her recent book *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004). There, she extends her theory of performativity by exploring the ways in which the discourse of humanity is negotiated and normativized in a post-9/11 world. Butler’s interrogation of how livable human life is normativized on a global scale—for example, via the mourning work of post-9/11 obituary writing—is particularly useful for reconsidering Hardt and Negri’s understanding of how the biopolitical normativization of Empirical subjectivity is performatively playing out in specific ways, modes, and sites, yet with universalizing effects on “humanity” as such. Furthermore, as a spectral

remainder which they deploy in their critique, Butler's performative politics of "human life"—which evokes both her influential theory of power and a rigorous critique of the conditions of possibility for the power-dynamics of "being human"—can be read in and through Hardt and Negri's book as perhaps a strategically "deconstructive" complication to and indeed as a functional model for the more "utopic" aspects of their project.

The project of her book is to imagine a provisional collective human ethics and radical politics of resistance that can negotiate a common ground of global humanity by way of a shared vulnerability to violence – the *precariousness of life*. Mourning work, such as the politics of obituary writing for victims of terrorism and politicized violence, she identifies as a key vector through which "mournable life" and "livable life" are discursively negotiated. For Butler, this negotiation amounts to the difference between being included in the discourse of humanity and its privileges (such as recourse to protection under international human rights laws or the Geneva conventions) and being dehumanized, or excluded from humanity altogether.

Butler sees this ethico-biopolitical negotiation exemplified in Levinas's thinking of the face-to-face encounter with the other. The unforeseeable, indefinable experience of being interrupted by the other's face—an encounter that, for Levinas, is outside of language, discourse, power, the conceptual finitude of humanity, and even the conceptual closure of the "face" as such—is for Butler a fundamental ethical encounter which she takes as an occasion for

conceptualizing a “universal” human experience by way of the other’s and the self’s common vulnerability to death. In the moment of contact with absolute otherness, involving the choice of killing or the danger of unconditionally opening oneself to such an unknown, the subject, Butler says, is exposed to their own vulnerability to death, or the shared experience of “precarious life.” That experience, for her, can potentially connect all the multiple, heterogeneous experiences of humanity in a non-violent global collectivity of humans. One way in which this can be achieved, Butler suggests, is to change and/or slow down the process of collective mourning work—for example, regarding those mourned in connection with the “war on terror”—and to expand our notions of what is mournable humanity (*Precarious Life* 30). In other words, we ought not to be too quick to dehumanize suspected terrorists or jump to preemptive nationalistic protectionist strategies that involve lionizing certain national “heroes” and demonizing the evil Other before we can understand the common ground on which we all mourn the loss of human life. We should publicly mourn, Butler says, not only those lives lost in the twin towers in New York, but also those Afghani and Iraqi lives lost in the “War on Terror” and those Palestinians and Israelis caught in a seemingly endless cycle of nationalistic violence – politicized violence that never adequately represents the singular struggles of those involved.

What I will focus on here is Butler’s critique in *Precarious Life* of Giorgio Agamben’s concept of the “homo sacer,” or “bare life,” which extends Butler’s concept of “precarious life” by identifying the metaphysical “ethical” limits of her

rethinking of Foucauldian power as the sovereign exception over biopolitical life. Butler and Agamben's debate haunts Hardt and Negri's concept of the multitude as competing specters haunting and contesting its operating principle of biopolitical performativity and offering different ways of reading it.

Butler, whose concept of the performative subject presupposes power to be *the* totalizing ground by which human subjects are made intelligible, perhaps too quickly rejects Agamben's "powerless" homo sacer. His understanding of power is arguably more in dialogue with Butler's than she seems to allow and raises the stakes of Butlerian identity politics by illuminating the possibility that certain political subjects can be – in fact are *necessarily*, according to Agamben – occluded altogether from the biopolitics of humanity as such. Agamben calls this the *ban* on bare life which he understands—via Carl Schmitt—to be a function of the sovereign exception over biopolitical human life.

While taking different routes to the same basic premise of how human life is sometimes negated and/or made "unlivable" by dominant power dynamics – Agamben via the "bare life" of the homo sacer which serves to orient the discursive limits of a sovereign exception operating both inside and outside those limits at the same time, and Butler via her Levinasian conceptualization of the precarious life of the radical other – some key insights into both their projects emerge: *On the one hand*, when read alongside Agamben, it becomes clearer how Butler's project perhaps hangs on too tenaciously to its centre—the totalizing (social-political) framework of power relations. Butler's critique in fact hinges on

the western-centric concept of power which she tends to construe as a universal dynamic through which to account for all – even violently occluded – human life. Indeed, as evidenced in her contribution to the book *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* (Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, Slavoj Žižek. New York: Verso, 2000), as well as in *Precarious Life*, a certain performative universality emerges in her work as a kind of strategic ethical “promise”—arguably connected to her irreducibly complex rethinking of “identity politics”—to remain open to and attempt to account for the radical possibility of non-normative and/or unforeseeably other human life.

*On the other hand*, Agamben’s metaphysical critique of power, read alongside Butler, is likewise exposed for its degree of universalism—specifically, the way in which “bare life” becomes the universalized subject of “the camp,” or what Agamben sees as the contemporary biopolitical paradigm of modernity *par excellence*. Butler thus uncovers some blind spots in Agamben’s critique—in particular, a lack of specificity when it comes to “bare life” and the singular dynamics operating, perhaps unaccountably, outside of the finitude of biopolitical “humanity” as such. In this way, Agamben seems to share with Butler—as well as with Hardt and Negri—a kind of latent Foucauldian anthropocentrism in their approaches to power which, as Butler’s book points out, raises the problem of taking into account that “life” which might not be *normatively* understood as properly or livably “human.”

This difference in opinion between Agamben and Butler, however, productively underscores certain key conditions of possibility for contemporary understandings of power, thus revealing it to be always inadequate to its own concept, always contextually specific, and always performatively in excess of its own conceptual “law.” Moreover, their interrogations of power (which implicate Hardt and Negri’s concept of biopower as spectral remainders constituting an unresolved contestation within it) reveal it to be always open to the possibility that it is *not* a universally applicable concept—at least not in the ways in which “it” might be presupposed to be—and that “it” is always in danger of becoming something else, or at least something unrecognizable simply as the conceptual finitude of “power” per se.

This debate thus raises some key questions: What must be presupposed before we even begin to conceptualize “power” as such? From a hauntological perspective, what are the conditions of possibility for power—or rather, for the multiple, heterogeneous spectral dynamics and matrixes of power which collectively constitute the “spirit” of that concept? By whom, for whom, and in whose interests is any given specter of “power” operating and/or being invoked in a particular space, time, and context? For example, is “power” coextensive with a certain theoretical sovereign exceptionalism whose historically western anthropocentric concept of “the human”—like the implied subject of Bush’s ethical rhetoric of “just war” in the name of “freedom”—tends to reinforce western Imperialism as the *normative* power dynamic? Who is the presupposed

subject of “power” in Agamben’s, Hardt and Negri’s, and Butler’s critiques? If, as Butler argues, these subjects are inaugurated *coextensively* with power, what remains in excess and singular, yet nonetheless stubbornly attached to such a subject while remaining unaccountable and irreducible *merely* within relations of “power” and/or “politics” as such? According to Butler, such performative enunciations of subjectivity always involve multiple, heterogeneous spectral *deformations* of their totalizing laws. In what ways does such a performative deformation implicate the very concept of “power” itself as a totalizing conceptual law which must, as a condition of its possibly “living on,” fall prey to the singularity of its own “supplemental” specters?

Butler’s and Agamben’s theories of power, like Hardt and Negri’s, are derived directly from the work of Michel Foucault. In *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Foucault rethinks Nietzsche’s concept of power, arguing that while it doesn’t actually exist but is only exercised, “power” is the disciplinary paradigm on which modern institutionality is founded. In short, it is the basic operating principle by which the “disciplinary society”—i.e. governmentality, institutions, in fact the biopolitical social sphere at its most basic levels—contains and regulates its subjects and by which those same subjects of power regulate and discipline themselves. An important implication of Foucauldian power is the idea that political agency, indeed the “deepest” subjective expressions of identity, are always already riven through-and-through with discourses of power. For Foucault, in a world viewed as matrixes of containment strategies,

power/knowledges and disciplinary technologies, subjective agency and the politics of resistance become fraught concepts. The very identity politics and discourses of anti-repression (a contemporary example being a certain strain of the anti-globalization movement), for example, are revealed by Foucault's analysis to be often containment strategies part and parcel of the dominant episteme's monopoly on power. To "desire" to be freed from the repressive bonds of globalization, in other words, can be read as an acceptance and a perpetuation of globalization's existence as such, and also to submit oneself as its proper subject. For example, Hardt and Negri's collectivity of the multitude founds itself by "being against" Empire, a gesture that operates concomitantly as an acknowledgement that global Empire exists—this, in spite of the fact that most people living in the world are not able to participate fully, or even partially in "globalization," leading many critics to observe that even if such a thing exists, it is far from "global." From a different strategic direction, to fight a "global war on terror" is to interpellate the world as a context proper to and completely repressed by "terror"—whatever is implied by such an abstract concept—as a justification for "freeing" it, which more accurately means terrorizing, militarizing and policing it.

Judith Butler's concept of performativity is a rethinking of the Foucauldian subject of power as both inaugurated by power relations and at the same time constantly *recreating* its ideal laws anew in dangerously supplemental, disruptively imperfect ways. Butler's *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997) explores



in depth what she, after Foucault, sees as the total immersion of the subject in power relations without recourse to an originary “individuality” or essentialized political identity that exists prior to the subject’s inauguration into power. For Butler, while the subject is inaugurated by power, and in fact *needs* power to “exist,” the performative nature of subjectivity also guarantees that the subject is constantly reinaugurating (or inaugurating anew) its own discursive law to which it refers for its “ideal” identity (e.g. man, woman, Jew, American, President). The subject, therefore, is always a *becoming* subject, and power is not prior to but is in fact *coextensive* with this becoming subject. Power, in other words, is not only subjectifying, but also subject to its own subjects, if in very unbalanced ways.

In *Precarious Life*, Butler extends her critique of the performative becoming-subject of power to the ways in which contemporary discourses of power, in particular the politics of mourning and obituary writing after 9/11, help to constitute the very humanity of subjects, the ethical limits of inclusion or exclusion into particular discourse(s) of humanity, and the negotiation of the limits of what can be conceived of as “livable” or “unlivable” life. Butler’s conceptualization of post-structuralist identity politics relies on a presupposition that “power” is *the* universalizing ground for political matrixes of intelligibility by and through which biopolitical subjectivity is inaugurated and “exists” as such. And yet, her thinking of power exhausts the term. For Butler, power is not simply discursive or linguistic, but also plays out in what she provisionally calls the “material” body of the subject: its ordering functions, normative habits, and its

illnesses and “conditions.” The excess of such “normativizing” human functioning—for instance, what is deemed, via the sovereign exception, as “aberrant” sexual desire—thus becomes “unlivable.”

Butler argues that power dynamics are always already present even with dehumanized forms of (human) life—what constitutes non-human humanity thus becomes a key problematic for her. In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1995), Agamben argues that power indeed has an outside which is paradoxically located within the biopolitical system as its “sovereign exception,” or as the sovereign right to suspend the law that, Agamben says, founds the law. The sovereign exception exercises its inaugural “ban” over what Agamben calls “bare life,” or the *homo sacer*. A close reading of Agamben’s ethical metaphysics of the ban lays bare the illusion of the infrastructural totality of power in Butler’s book, and thus dismantles power’s privileged status as the “ground” by which all human subjectivity is seen to be inaugurated and made intelligible. My aim in interrogating some of the limits and ellipses of Butlerian power is to implicate in my critique the subject of Hardt and Negri’s multitude, which contains the spectral remainder of Butlerian performativity.

According to Agamben, the sovereign exception is the very metaphysical condition of possibility for matrixes of power, as well as their implied subjects, to come into being. Indeed, Butler is working around and through this same “subject/object” problem of power/subjectivity when she discusses the co-extensivity of power’s inauguration with the inauguration of its subjects.

Agamben most clearly illustrates the concept of the sovereign exception with his example of the concentration camp:

The Jew living under Nazism is the privileged negative referent of the new biopolitical sovereignty and is, as such, a flagrant case of a *homo sacer* [or “bare life”] in the sense of a life that may be killed but not sacrificed. [...] The Jews were exterminated not in a mad and giant holocaust but exactly as Hitler had announced, “as lice,” which is to say, as bare life. (*Homo Sacer* 114)

A “mad” and “gigantic holocaust,” Agamben implies here, suggests a madness that has some proximity to a normativized “sanity” of human power relations. Such a “gigantic” breach of humanity—or the normative limits of what is globally accepted, via such avenues as International Human Rights legislation, to be morally “humane”—is only conceivable if one accepts the “humanity” of those humans exterminated in the Nazi death camps. Such a re-humanization of those bare lives in the camp is what constitutes the feverish work of juridical bodies such as the Nuremberg trials and Holocaust memorials: to galvanize those lives as normatively livable and their extermination as universally intolerable “madness.” The universalization of power, as suggested by Butler’s, is in this regard a necessary, if impossibly “mad” ethical gesture which seeks to guard against such de-humanizing “insanity” which the Holocaust universally represents. Yet, “sanity” here depends upon a fixed logic of “the normatively sane” that Agamben argues is not operating within the space of the Nazi concentration camp, and which, at best, can only ever be reached for, or done “justice” to, via the “madness” of making undecidable, if nonetheless urgent ethical decisions regarding what constitutes livable life.

There is a difference for Agamben between biopolitical life and bare life – the former represents the managed political subject of power relations, and the latter is the necessary negative referent by which power relations (through the sovereign exception) demarcate their epistemological limits, or decide what counts as legal life—bodies that “matter.” For Agamben, Foucauldian power runs up against its conceptual limit in the space of the “camp,” where power as such no longer applies. Agamben argues that there is a metaphysical “outside” (or “ethical” limit) to power that is necessarily always present as the inaugural demarcation by the sovereign centre of what counts as viable power relations—for example human life—and what is merely “bare life,” or *homo sacer*. The *homo sacer* (a Latin term Agamben excavates from early Roman law) is that which cannot be murdered or sacrificed because it doesn’t count as viable biopolitical life.

Of course, Agamben’s isn’t the first critique of Foucauldian power mounted. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her influential essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” points out the Eurocentrism of Foucault’s concept of power, holding that it presupposes a specifically western-style subject of power which is “made possible by a certain stage in exploitation, for [Foucault’s] vision of geographical discontinuity [(or a universalized struggle against all repressive technologies and institutions of power made possible by a totalizing theory of power-dynamics transcendent of geographical specificity)] is geopolitically specific to the First World” (289). To read Agamben’s and Spivak’s critiques side by side is to

identify Foucauldian “power’s” sovereign exception as specifically western and “First World” in origins, even if it tends to be applied universally and trans-historically as a methodological “hinge.” The humanity produced by and through such a biopolitical concept as power, therefore, will also have to acknowledge the historical burden of its own western-centrism – for example, its Hegelian remainder of the master-slave dialectic, or Butler’s performative subject who is somehow always miraculously coextensive *only* with power, as opposed to some other possible conceptualization of ethico-political relationality.

Butler seems to dodge Spivak’s charge against Foucault’s western-centrism by claiming that while human subjects rely on power relations for their inauguration into “life,” they also disrupt these very relations by their supplemental, always imperfect *performative* references to the idealized (logocentric) law. Thus, if power is a western-centric concept by way of Foucault, the condition of possibility for performative subjects to constantly reinaugurate sovereign power relations is, for Butler, that power itself is always a becoming concept, and thus always already in excess of its “western” epistemological limits by way of its singular, performative subjects. Which begs the question: in what ways is Butlerian power, as a seemingly totalizing ground for all intelligible “becoming” subjectivity, *not* able to conceptualize its own limits as a kind of ethico-political ground for humanity due to its own performative condition of possibility – even if those “limits” are always being renegotiated? And in what ways are those limits hauntologically tied to their

western-centric Foucauldian genealogy, which becomes a kind of inaugural ethico-metaphysical limit occluding some of that very “excess life” that the mapping of power dynamics—from Hegel to Nietzsche to Foucault to Butler to Hardt and Negri—was undertaken in order to unpack?

And yet, in *Precarious Life*, Butler criticizes Agamben’s critique of power along these very lines that it is universalist, arguing that

if bare life, life conceived as biological minimum, becomes a condition to which we are all reducible, then we might find a certain universality in this condition. Agamben writes, ‘We are all potentially exposed to this condition,’ that is, ‘bare life’ underwrites the actual political arrangements in which we live, posing as a contingency into which any political arrangement might dissolve. Yet such general claims do not yet tell us how this power functions differentially, to target and manage certain populations, to derealize the humanity of subjects who might potentially belong to a community bound by commonly recognized laws; and they do not tell us how sovereignty, understood as state sovereignty in this instance, works by differentiating populations on the basis of ethnicity and race, how the systematic management and derealization of populations function to support and extend the claims of a sovereignty accountable to no law; how sovereignty extends its own power precisely through the tactical and permanent deferral of the law itself. In other words, the suspension of the life of a political animal, the suspension of standing before the law, is itself a tactical exercise, and must be understood in terms of the larger aims of power. (67-68)

Butler points here to what she rightly sees as the universalizing, “Dasein-like” structure of “bare life.” Agamben’s all-encompassing concept of bare life which, for him, is *the* non-ground on which legitimate biopolitical humanity finds its orienting oppositional term, causes him to hold up “the camp” as an equally universalized paradigm of modernity. Nonetheless, Butler’s invocation of “political animals” here subtly underlines the finitude of “the human” that her concept of power is pushing up against. Indeed, her anthropocentric deployment

of animality seems to place it both inside and outside “humanity” all at once as simultaneously its orienting oppositional term and abjected other. Animality, for Agamben, can indeed serve as a containment strategy *within* the discourse of humanity for banning bare life, but it does not constitute the same thing as bare life’s total lack of proximity to biopolitical humanity. That said, Butler and Agamben make many similar points regarding the necessity of looking more slowly and rigorously at the *singularity* of even what is deemed to be “non-livable life” or “non-human” life.

For example, even given its degree of universalism, “bare life” is useful at the very least for pointing out the metaphysical structure of power and to the excess that can be located even (and perhaps especially) *within* that totalizing discourse. In short, Agamben’s metaphysics of power focuses on disclosing *by whom, for whom, and in whose interests* purportedly “universal” biopolitical discourses are being invoked in particular locations, times, and contexts. Butler is likewise acutely attentive to such questions and to the alterity and excess produced by the normativized limits of power. Nonetheless, she tends to universalize her own critical optics through which she unpacks such ethico-political dynamics exclusively within the limits and exclusions of “power” itself.

Agamben’s intervention is to focus on the ways in which “humanity” is projected onto radical otherness in order to demarcate that which no longer counts within the biopolitics of “human life.” For example, he points to concepts such as animality, virtuality, the “dead” (including “brain death” as a popular legal limit

for livable life), and plant life. Butler's methodological grounding in power presupposes that the collective humanity of subjects is – *must* be – always identifiable, always salvageable as the trace(s) of an existing or becoming power dynamic. She has a point here. Without some impossible attempt to universalize and thus make inclusive the rights of the human (for instance, via power), what recourse has “something like bare life” to win the right to have rights, or even to “livable life?” Butler's methodology thus demands such an impossible approach to finding a “common ground,” no matter how repressive a certain regime or sovereign exceptionalism might try to erase that precarious claim to common humanity or to self-fashion it in its own exclusive interests.

But does Butler's refusal to acknowledge a necessary, orienting “outside” to power, given of course that power doesn't exist *per se* but can only be exercised, not also enact a kind of *Butlerian sovereign exception* over humanity by performing a logocentric containment of subjects within a certain, historically western-style biopolitical humanity and/or logic of power? Agamben states the problem like this:

If life, in modern biopolitics, is immediately politics, here this unity, which itself has the form of an irrevocable decision, withdraws from every external decision and appears as an indissoluble cohesion in which it is impossible to isolate something like a bare life. In the state of exception become the rule, the life of *homo sacer*, which was the correlate of sovereign power, turns into an existence over which power no longer seems to have any hold. (153)

According to Agamben, the “irrevocability” of such a metaphysical decision to presuppose a certain concept of “politics” as one's predetermined point of



departure is also to predetermine certain approaches, questions, ethical dynamics, and even the rough outlines of what the proper shape of such a “politicized” subject might be. In short, as a *naturalized* ground ordering the world into which we are all thrown and miraculously land on our hind feet as “human subjects,” politics, for Agamben, becomes its own a priori limited and exclusionary condition of possibility for understanding and indeed living “life” as such. And what such a biopolitics limits, according to Agamben, is the possibility of “*something like* a bare life.” I emphasize “something like” here, to point out a self-reflexive turn in Agamben’s conceptualization of bare life that Butler doesn’t fully acknowledge in her rejection of his concept. “Something like bare life” is less unequivocally an ontological totality, and more like a hazy outside—what Thomas Carl Wall calls a “radical passivity,” or ungrounding non-proximity—which, for the sake of comparison, is “something like” an irreducible alterity that always threatens to radically interrupt the politics of the self-same, or even “politics.” Such a hazy, irreducible term is thus useful for its opening to the possibility of radically other concepts of “life” that are beyond politics, beyond biopower, and beyond a proper human language to grasp it. Agambenian bare life thus begins to sound as closely related to Levinas’s concern for the radical other as Butlerian “precarious life” is.<sup>49</sup> This common concern of Butler and Agamben’s is thus traceable in their very theoretical divergence: both their critiques are quickened by the urgency of accounting for the unaccountable

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<sup>49</sup> This is indeed the premise of Thomas Wall’s book *Radical Passivity: Levinas, Blanchot, and*

radical other to hegemonic power. In short, both are ultimately concerned with that alterity to normative power from which both Butler and Agamben understand the fundamental call of ethics to emanate.

A key question thus arises on which Butler's and Agamben's dis/agreement hinges: Can something like the *homo sacer* (take, for example, the Jew in the Nazi death camp) exercise power, or ever penetrate the enabling infrastructures of the state or of communities of empowerment, a subversive agency that Foucault and Butler suggest is always at least a remote possibility? Or is this option sometimes simply not available for those who have had parts or the entirety of their humanity relegated to irrelevance or "bare existence?" And what is the effect of this (remote, or perhaps unrelenting?) possibility when read into Butler's critique? In short, under what conditions does the "law" (or the metaphysical ethico-political limit on livable life normatively and juridically grounded by the sovereign ban) totally exclude some life from the power dynamics of humanity, a discourse synonymous, in a certain way, with the very anthropocentric concept of power itself? Or, is the ban in fact the very condition of possibility for power from the start?

Agamben's critique of the sovereign exception over "bare life" suggests that it is indeed the case that the ban inaugurates power as such, since it is only by the total exclusion of all but certain biopolitically relevant life that a system of power can inaugurate itself into being. I also want to suggest here that

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*Agamben* (New York: SUNY Press, 1999).

Agamben's critique allows for *differing degrees* of a subject's exclusion from biopolitical life through the sovereign exception. For there is no "one" proper sovereign exception, or transcendental law of the exception to which all others refer directly and without performative, or dissonantly simulacral consequences.

The sovereign exception, in other words, isn't a pure trans-historical Spirit in- and for-itself, but instead is comprised of multiple, heterogeneous, différential specters of sovereign exceptionality which collectively comprise its spirit.

Examples of this ongoing negotiation over the competing and ever shifting limits of "bare life" vs. biopolitical life are those laws and practices—differing from singular individual to singular individual, from community to community, from nation to nation, from global imaginary to global imaginary—surrounding the ethics of abortion, "brain death," the prisoner awaiting execution who is thus in a sense "already dead," the space of the concentration camp, and Agamben's ancient Greek example of the "wolf-man" (Agamben 104-11).

The wolf-man is particularly intriguing due to its ambivalent embodiment of humanity and animality—an anthropomorphic dualism whose self-referentiality points to the emptiness of both terms (the animal being as human a concept as "the human"). A mythical category in ancient Greek law, it was used to identify and apprehend individuals on the basis that they fall neither into the categories of animality nor of humanity, and thus could not be murdered or sacrificed since they were already judged as "dead" by the law. But even worse, the ambivalent nature of such hum-animality makes it *necessary* to kill them in

order to thwart their performative supplementation of the “natural” order of things. The wolf-man’s extermination is thus a kind of metaphysical normativization of the ethico-biopolitical law of humanity by eradicating that “excess” which transgresses both categories simultaneously, and thus throws into question the clear diagnosis of what exactly that border between animality and humanity “truly” is.

The juridicial language of the wolf-man thus serves as an occasion for more closely reading President George W. Bush’s vow to bomb terrorists and Talibani soldiers hiding in “caves” in Afghanistan “back to the stone age.” The particular sovereign ban on “terrorist life” is deployed by Bush precisely along the lines of a perceived lack of humanity in the terrorists who, along with those held at Guantanamo Bay and in secret prisons across the globe, are thus abjected through an extra-legal “moral” argument for their sub-human treatment and indeed for their “extermination like lice” without recourse to human rights, international law, or Geneva conventions. Importantly, this “extra legal” argument is not, according to Agamben, only outside the law, but *founds* the law by demarcating—via the sovereign ban—its very limits, inclusions and exclusions of who is properly subject to it. In the particular case of the post-9/11 war on terror, the ethical implications and political stakes of such a dehumanizing, social-Darwinist rhetoric are brought clearly into focus when I think, by way of Agamben’s *homo sacer*, how the individual lives of these fighters have been

rendered almost pre-historic, as “animal” or “insect” (as dwelling underground or in caves suggests).

This reading of the current post-9/11 global political situation from the perspective of the “homo sacer”—or *something like it*—doesn’t *replace* Butler’s method of slowly straining to hear within the rhetorical din of power dynamics (in which I am always in danger of become contained and managed as a critic) for the faint whispers of the precarious life of the de-humanized other. It would be too simple simply to dismiss Butler’s method as irredeemably “western-centric,” or to discard her performative subject as somehow methodologically ineffective. Clearly this is not the case, and surely the rigorous, slow exercise of “straining to hear” for gaps and absences in such a rhetorical morass as Bush’s ethical rhetoric is of urgent importance and well worth the effort. But in order to better judge what traces of radical otherness we can actually hope to find in such a violent ethical discourse, perhaps it is also important to recognize the extent to which certain very powerful sovereign discourses of political exceptionalism can effectively erase the very humanity and/or relevance of certain “publics” by banning them. Indeed, says Agamben, this is *always* the case: Such a depoliticization, which amounts to dehumanization, is, according to him, the very condition and operating principle of power. Yet instead of diminishing the effectiveness of Butlerian power as a hinge for unpacking the nuances of biopower dynamics, Agamben’s insights arguably expand the effectiveness of her

method by identifying the radical potential of understanding what it always already *doesn't* account for.

But what is the impact of Butler's and Agamben's disagreement over the limits, inclusions and exclusions of power on Hardt and Negri's theory of Empire? Immense. First, their concept of biopower—what they describe as an *immanent, immediate* ground for subject formation in Empire—hinges on the “social” and thus constitutes a kind of discursive constructivism critiqued by Butler in *Bodies that Matter*. Moreover, Empirical biopower's virtual network structures presuppose the “nearly” totalizing reach of Empire, a subsumption and/or discounting of any “practical outside” to its biopolitical network structures that Agamben's concept of “bare life” seems to call into question due to his assertion that the sovereign ban on “something like bare life” is the very condition of possibility for power. What Butler's and Agamben's interventions into the conditions and operating principles of power mean for reading Hardt and Negri's concept of biopower is perhaps what Butler, in *Precarious Life*, signals as the need to more slowly, more rigorously examine the *politics of “power.”* In short, to examine by whom, for whom, and in whose interests a certain dominant concept of livable life—underwritten by a totalizing discourse of what counts as “biopower”—is operating, particularly via those post-9/11 universalist rhetorics most dominantly re-negotiating the limits and inclusions of what counts as “global humanity,” its rights and “freedoms.” For example, who exactly is implied and/or excluded with Hardt and Negri's definition of biopower as “a form

of power that regulates social life from the interior" (*Empire* 23)? Such a definition arguably relates "life" too closely to the "social," "thereby precluding knowledges and questions that remain essential to the political undertakings of a peaceful and democratic future" (Clark). Indeed, what are the possible future(s) of "something like peace" if its conditions of possibility (understood as oppositional biopolitics against Empire) are immediately "social" in Hardt and Negri's project? Is "something like bare life" effectively banned from such a "peace?"

#### *Conclusion: Specters of Post-9/11 Empire*

What I've done in this chapter is interrogate the ways in which some key spectral resonances are working in, through and against each other in the terms of Hardt and Negri's *Empire* and *Multitude*. These include Nietzschean plasticity, Nancy and Agamben's concepts of singularity, and finally Judith Butler's concepts of performativity and power. As I show in chapter 1, these spectral remainders strategically complement the two-handed method of Hardt and Negri's *Empire* and *Multitude*, extending and complexifying their "deconstructive" critique even within the "utopic," onto-linguistic structure of their political project. Finally, as a specter of Empire, the post-9/11 ethical rhetoric of the Bush administration is likewise implicated in the ways in which these supplemental remainders of contemporary ethics haunt Hardt and Negri's project.

What comes up again and again via the different spectral contestations haunting the subject of the multitude/Empire is a universalization of the biopolitical ground on which its “life” is played out in Hardt and Negri’s project as properly “the social.” A wider consequence of this is a preclusion of other possible singular modes and “materializations” of subjective “life” and struggle that might also concomitantly exist outside of those detectible only within the conceptual apparatus of Empire and the multitude. On the other hand, the very invocation of these competing specters of biopolitical subjectivity in Hardt and Negri’s project points to an openness to radically other forms of life that the multitude—particularly as a strategically flawed doppelganger of Empire—cannot account for in and for-itself, and/or might become in its possible future(s).

My next chapter will explore yet another hauntological interruption into post-9/11 ethics: the ways in which Hegel’s philosophical program is a kind of proto-theoretical remainder hauntologically mirroring and at the same time “auto-deconstructing” Bush’s ethical rhetoric. What I hope to show with this comparative analysis are the ways in which Hegel’s encyclopedic system—arguably the last great philosophy of the global—haunts “Empire” even in the very terms through which it is unfolded in Hardt and Negri’s project. Hegel’s own proto-theoretical critique of universality—through what Tilottama Rajan calls the “profound reflexiveness [built] into his system through the doubling of ‘levels’ as ‘spheres’” (Rajan, “In the Wake of Cultural Studies,” 79)—thus serves as a spectral remainder interrupting Bush’s rhetoric from within: its already self-



imploding architectonic foundation on which the contemporary politician's  
rhetoric hauntologically grounds itself.

### Chapter 3

#### The Hegelian Reminders in the Ethical Rhetoric of 9/11

*[In] the Hegelian State [...], each member has his truth in the other, which is the State itself, whose reality is never more present than when its members give their lives in a war that the monarch – the effective presence-to-itself of the Subject-State – has alone and freely decided to wage.*

Jean-Luc Nancy *The Inoperative Community*, 12

*This undivided Substance of absolute freedom ascends the throne of the world without any power being able to resist it.*

G. W. F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 357

*There are those who, as they say, seek the Lord, and in their untutored opinion assure themselves of possessing all things directly. They make no effort to raise their subjective experience into a knowledge of the truth and a consciousness of objective right and duty. From such persons can proceed nothing except abomination and folly, and the demolition of all ethical relations.*

G. W. F. Hegel *Philosophy of Right*, 261

In previous chapters, I unpacked some key spectral remainders haunting Hardt and Negri's concept of Empire and its most dominant recent symptom, the post-9/11 ethical rhetoric of the Bush administration. Tarrying with these spectral remainders—of plasticity, singularity, power and performativity—helps to better outline the reified ideal ethical subject of post-9/11 Empire. These same specters of post-9/11 Empire also point to an underlying preoccupation in Hardt and Negri's project with "the social" whose subject they presuppose to be an "immanent" and universal form of humanity. Their critique of Empire, which unfolds as a "radical ontology of the production of the social" (*Empire* 46), thus

tends to construe biopolitics in hyper-accelerated and reductively virtual-discursive terms. I have been arguing, therefore, that their project cannot account for other possible and/or unforeseeable forms of biopolitical life outside the social. Remaining open to the possibility of their project being interrupted by alterity, however, is vital for comprehending the broader—indeed more “global” (as opposed to “universal”)—effects of contemporary ethics and power in “Empire.” Further, to remain open and hospitable to alterity can be understood as an urgent ethical demand emanating from beyond their project—as well as *from within it*—made by those others for whom their project cannot definitively, ethically, politically, nor “quasi-ontologically” accommodate. Moreover, such an ethical openness arguably constitutes their project’s best hope for moving beyond the “worst” plagues of post-9/11 globalization/Empire, and—equally important—allowing for its “best” possible futures to come. In short, a theory of globalization, if it is to remain open to “the global,” cannot reduce “globality” to a finite and exclusionary concept of “globalization” as such, nor can it foreclose *a priori* what the concept of “globalization” might also be, have been, or possibly become by conceptualizing “it” as a universality. The disastrous consequences of *not* remaining open to globalization’s others are demonstrated by the “war on terror” which, from a certain perspective, can be read as a Leviathan-like force-of-law whose most apparent aims are to arrest and reshape “the global” in its own universalized image.

Read differently, Hardt and Negri's universalization of the social can also be understood as a *strategic* gesture meant as a mimicry which is also a mockery of what they see as Empire's hegemonic vision of biopolitical universality. As such, globalization/Empire can be understood as a totalizing *Spirit* out of step with those singular *spectral* lives and local struggles it supposedly circumscribes within itself. Thus, the radical ontology of the multitude, as opposed to being merely a socio-utopic political strategy, can also be understood to work *anti-ontologically*—as an auto-deconstructive remainder positioned within and against Empire all at once. In common with Derridian deconstruction, therefore, is their anti-positivist critique of Empire which nonetheless holds the (impossible) *possibility* of “ontology” open and in reserve for just such an occasion as performatively “being against” Empire's hegemonic global-imaginary.

The most dominant symptom of contemporary Empire—the Bush administration's post-9/11 ethico-political rhetoric and its global effects—likewise hypostatizes its own vision of the world as an immanent, all-encompassing plane of biopolitics. This worldview understands human life to be organized according to universalized western (evangelical) Christian and neoliberal politico-economic values—all supposedly reducible to “freedom” in and for itself. Held up as the most “ideal” example of the universal Spirit of human freedom, “America” (whatever that concept might actually mean) is assumed to possess a kind of sovereign exceptionalist authority to *impose* democracy and freedom in its own image on the whole world. In short, for Bush,

globalization is not just about interconnected political economies, the “Washington consensus,” the global reach of the U.S. military-industrial-congressional complex, global technologies, and interconnected virtual network structures of global sociality. For him, it also reflects an *a priori* theologically grounded “intelligent design” ordering all life on Earth. One could call it a universalizing “Spirit” of freedom—the “end of history.”

Already some key Hegelian themes are detectible here.

President Bush’s theocratic worldview is indeed haunted by the specter of Hegel—the philosopher of universality and its ethico-theologico-political effects *par excellence* and arguably the intellectual forefather of contemporary globalization. Hegel’s influence can be felt, for example, in neoliberal-style globalization’s drive to ethically, politically and economically order the whole world. Such a universalizing drive has intensified after 9/11 and taken a disastrous turn with the “war on terror.” That “war,” in fact, is unfolding as a globalization of violence, neo-colonial economics, and state terrorism. This chapter interrogates the ways in which the specters of Hegel haunting post-9/11 globalization/Empire not only represent its poisonous roots, but also when rigorously distilled, likewise promise to be powerful potential remedies for those very plagues of the “new world order” which they helped spawn. That said, this chapter does not set out to draw direct comparisons between a certain historical Hegel—the 19<sup>th</sup>-century German idealist philosopher—and universalizing post-9/11 ethical rhetorics such as George Bush’s, or between Hegel and the

postmodern-utopic political philosophy of Hardt and Negri. Instead, it focuses on the ways in which Bush and Hardt and Negri are haunted by—and are themselves specters of—the multiple, heterogeneous spirits of Hegel and his idealist legacy.

Indeed, my contention is that Hegel is often much more complex, current, and cogently attuned to contemporary globalization than many of his recent specters and critics. For example: on the one hand, Hegel provides a universalizing, Christocentric systematization of the world. On the other hand, he can be read as one of the most rigorous, self-reflexive critics of these same idealist propositions which he took to their very exhaustive limits. In short, as the best example of an idealist philosophical project which attempts to take into account all of human existence, Hegel's legacy haunts contemporary globalization/Empire, the anti-globalization movement, as well as the war on terror as not only the very intellectual foundations on which they are based, but also as an “ideal” occasion for considering how such universalizing worldviews already contain the seeds of their own auto-deconstruction.

But what is urgent about discussing Hegel after 9/11 and which specters of Hegel are we discussing?

Arguably, when talking about the ethical rhetoric of post-9/11 Empire, one is *already* speaking of Hegel because this rhetoric evokes him in powerful and often predetermined ways. Francis Fukuyama's *End of History and the Last Man*, for example, casts neoconservatism in clearly Hegelian, neo-evangelist terms—terms that the post-9/11 neoconservatism of the Bush administration has

theocratized, accelerated and militarized in ways that have made even Fukuyama balk. In short, the spectral remainders of Hegel are right now being directly—if quite differently—invoked by competing neoconservative theories of globalization. However, they are also evoked by Hardt and Negri in an equally totalizing, if even more self-reflexively “Hegelian” way as radically contingent ontology. Such a haunting by Hegel of post-9/11 Empire is evident in the very terms and motifs employed by its competing ethico-politico-philosophical discourses.

This chapter is organized around some key Hegelian concepts haunting post-9/11 ethics, including freedom, love, family, the state, moral terror, and his “great man” theory of World History. In this way, the chapter takes Hegel as an “ideal” occasion for reconsidering the universalizing effects of dominant post-9/11 ethical rhetoric and the ways in which it is hypostatizing the possible futures to come of the “whole world.”

### *Theory and the Spectral Reminders of Hegel*

The overarching premise of this chapter is that the spectral remainders of Hegelian idealism haunting post-9/11 ethics can be read a kind of dangerous, proto-deconstructive supplement contesting contemporary globalization/Empire from within. Such a reading of Hegel takes into account his “(non)method” of encyclopedically ordering the world which—if read according to his own rigorous, self-reflexive standards—arguably refuses the very systemic closure

which characterizes his idealist project. Tilottama Rajan makes this point in her essay “In the Wake of Cultural Studies: Globalization, Theory, and the University,” identifying what she sees as a nascent theoretical method buried within Hegel’s totalizing system. She argues that his

encyclopedia [...] is rather what makes Idealism a first form of Theory, or makes Theory an organization of knowledge that emerges from the ruins of Idealism. For Hegel builds a profound reflexivity into his system through the doubling of ‘levels’ as ‘spheres’ [which] in the long term [...] effects a dereferentialization in the positive sense of ‘breaking down existing structures of defense against Thought’. (Rajan 79)

What Rajan privileges here as “Theory”—a term she employs only referentially to signify an ever-shifting constellation of questions and critical approaches aimed at keeping *in* question the metaphysical foundations of philosophy, critical “methods,” positivisms, and systematic organizations of knowledge—is prefigured in Hegel’s rigorous, self-reflexive *approach* to universal systematicity. However, it is his system’s “failure” that, for Rajan, clinches Hegel’s status as proto-Theoretician.

For Rajan, Hegel’s “method” is particularly evident in his explanation in *The Philosophy of Right* of his conceptualization of the telescoping spheres of universal existence. With this foundational motif, he conceptualizes world history unfolding as an immanent, teleological progress towards the truth of Spirit in a series of hierarchically-ordered stages, or spheres. The first sphere in the chain is the loving, “natural” sphere of the family. It eventually matures into the second sphere—the task-oriented organization of civic society. Finally, civil society realizes within itself humanity’s teleological end by becoming the ideal ethical



community of the state. The state form, for Hegel, is the truest ethical reflection of Spirit. Each sphere in this chain can thus be understood to always refer supplementally outside itself to the next sphere, as well as to their “third [mediating] term,” Spirit. Importantly, this “thirdness” is infinite and ungraspable—*except* through the finite spherical forms of communal being. Spirit thus constitutes a subject-object problem within spherical existence which throws into question Spirit’s stabilizing effect as an *orienting* transcendental signified of spherical life. This apparent logic of supplementarity at the heart of spherical existence, according to Rajan, thus *opens up* barriers to thought. By this, she means that the supplemental logic of the spheres effectively destabilizes Hegel’s more outwardly stated aim of systematically illuminating the “absolute knowledge” about any given sphere and instead necessitates an ever-telescoping proliferation of *knowledges* in order to produce the *effect* of Spiritual unity. Spirit thus becomes, on closer examination, less a “thing” or supreme ordering element, and more apparently a *hidden economy*, a *structural power dynamics* by which subjectivity is individuated, ordered and managed. The differential relationality between the spheres, however, can be read as opening the Spiritual concept of “absolute knowledge” to infinite interpretations and variations—perhaps even to the radical interruption of alterity which, like the next possible sphere, is always *beyond* the finitude of given thought.

Jacques Derrida, in his classic postmodernist (non-)text *Glas*, also identifies a kind of doubleness at work in Hegel’s project that cannot be resolved

into a neat dialectical synthesis. For instance: Hegel's is an exemplary Christian philosophy,<sup>50</sup> yet has also been read as anti-theological; Hegel gives an account of the true revelation of Spirit as it circumscribes the totality of time and space, nonetheless his system is profoundly historical; Hegel identifies the very end of History and its immanently true forms of being, but systematically unfolds this world historical Spirit via telescoping spheres of finite, becoming being which are explicitly supplemental in structure. In *Glas*, Derrida keys in on the way in which Spirit—in particular in its inaugural manifestation as natural, familial “love”—functions in Hegel's philosophy as a kind of inaugural remainder of “presence” which resides simultaneously both inside and outside Hegel's system. In fact, says Derrida, familial love is that on which Hegel's whole system hinges, yet is the very thing that must be rejected in the process of the subject's maturation into citizenship within the sphere of the state.

But how is this justified by Hegel? Derrida explains that the “knowledge relation that organizes this whole scene [and its phallogocentric hierarchy is] a third, a third term, the element of the infinite's relation to self: it is the holy spirit” (31). This third term thus mediates and secretly pre-determines Hegelian ethics, always already infecting the dialectic with its secret economy. Hegel's ethical system, however, hinges on a negational logic of justice which depends upon the unmediated purity of dialectical “synthesis” for producing and policing authentic

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<sup>50</sup> For example, the Hegelian dialectic is structured as a kind of Christian holy trinity of thesis—anti-thesis—synthesis (Spirit). And Hegel himself, in the *Philosophy of History*, calls the description of his system in that book a kind of “Theodicaea—a justification of the ways of God” (15).

ethical subjects. The intrusion of “Spirit” as an ordering principle of spherical existence can thus be read as the very *end point* of Hegelian ethics, while at the same time infecting and destroying its purity by predetermining the outcome of its negational system of justice *a priori*.

To be fair, one way of reading the German idealist project (for example, from Fichte to Schelling to Hegel) is as a series of more or less successful attempts to resolve an apparently irresolvable aporia—the fundamental Kantian question of how infinite (or noumenal) essences of *things in themselves* can possibly be reflected in the merely finite perceptible (or phenomenal) forms in which perception apprehends them. For Kant, the fundamental fissure between reflected thought and its object represents the core issue regarding the conditions of possibility for knowledge. The German idealists carried on this project by rejecting the concept of the “thing in itself,” and instead sought to arrive at synthesized ontological truths by *dialectically* determining their truth or falsity. Hegel’s version of dialectics, for example, attempts to fold “reason” back into itself by rigorously retracing its historical unfolding. In this way, Hegel sought to scientifically arrive at self-evidently true knowledge about “being.” However, the underlying logic of “supplementarity” which characterizes Hegel’s architectonics of being remains a stubborn remainder in his system which denies it dialectical “purity.”

Intriguingly, Hegel himself hints towards this very supplemental structure of his thought in different ways. For example, in the final pages of Hegel’s

*Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel offers what I call a kind of “hauntological” rendering of History which—like the doubling of spheres—only obliquely refers to historical figures and concepts by literally painting their pictures. Yet, these portraits themselves seem to “embody” *becoming* history unfolding itself through time. That is, they embody this becoming spectral history without an actual body—only an idealized, aesthetic portrait of one. In Hegel’s words, this is a “slow-moving succession of Spirits, a gallery of images, each of which, endowed with all the riches of Spirit, moves thus slowly just because the Self has to penetrate and digest this entire wealth of its substance” (Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* 492). Hegel’s description of the spectral portraits thus suggests that they are indeed more than merely reflective images of long dead great historical men, but are themselves active historical subjects slowly *moving* through history.

Moreover, these spectral portraits stage a kind of work of mourning and memorialization which evokes a tension between the individual, familial lives of their subjects—history’s “great men”—and the idealized images of exemplary state citizenship. For example, the paintings render the singularity of these “great men of world history” into idealized death-masks aestheticized and archived within a nationalistic gallery of historical progress. On the one hand, as supposedly true reflections of historical progress sanctioned by the state and thus assigned canonical “value,” the portraits are *consigned*<sup>51</sup> via a kind of nationalistic

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<sup>51</sup> Jacques Derrida, in his book *Archive Fever*, coins the term “consignation” to signify the “gathering together [of seemingly disparate] signs” aimed at coordinating a vision in which “all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration” (3)—an ideal, Derrida stipulates, which is always ultimately inaccessible; indeed, non-existent.

mourning work aimed at archiving true Spiritual knowledge about national history. On the other hand, these portraits sever the singular “bodily” lives of those men from their idealized aesthetic images which, nonetheless, are depicted as themselves slowly moving through history. Yet, in this disembodied condition of the portraits we can identify a tension akin to the unhappy consciousness of the master-slave dynamic. In short, the “master” or “greatness” ideally represented in the portraits is seen to occlude the “slave,” or singular bodily life on which the master is dependent for even *slowly* ambulating through history. The labouring body of the slave is thus abjected and jettisoned from Hegel’s portrait gallery, yet is nonetheless evoked by its very *indispensability* for the master’s historical progress through time and space on behalf of the state. No wonder the portraits move so slowly, without the aid of bodies!

Hegel’s theory of art has been reinterpreted, for example, by twentieth-century avant gardists who dispensed with a certain concept of form under the presupposition that works of art, as individual depictions of “God’s autobiography,” are already reflective parts of a larger universal “artistic mainstream.”<sup>52</sup> But, arguably much closer to Hegel—particularly as depicted in his motif of a historical art museum at the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*—, is the 19<sup>th</sup>-century German neo-gothic movement. This movement came about as

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<sup>52</sup> See Lucian Krukowski, “Hegel, ‘Progress,’ and the Avant-Garde” in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 44, No. 3. (Spring 1986), 279-90. Also see Marilyn Stokstad, *Art History*, rev. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., vol. 1: Pearson, 2005.

a result of the gothic revival in Britain spurred by Horace Walpole (1717-1797), and undertook a kind of re-invention of ancient forms (Stokstad, *Art History*, 953-55). To be clear, this movement was part of a decidedly different intellectual project than that represented by most German idealist philosophers of Hegel's period, such as Fichte, Schelling and Hegel himself. Even Schelling's "natural" philosophy, of which his theory of art and artistic genius is a prominent feature, is in no way reducible to an idealized theory of art. That said, German neo-gothic art's historicist impulse clearly resonates with Hegel's view of history as always containing *a priori* the fundamental idea of its Spiritual potential which must progress historically in order to arrive at its most ideal forms. Hegel's depiction of a world-historical art museum (which in some ways is reminiscent of—if not reducible to—a kind of spooky Gothic aesthetic and historical sensibility), for example, ends up rendering history's great men into a haunted procession of spectral artistic representations. This aestheticization of historical spirits which transgress the eschatological limits of time and space thus arguably evokes a kind of critique of "authenticity" most associated with postmodernism.

But can even a proto-postmodernist-style critique of "authenticity" actually be attributed to Hegel, the most accomplished idealist philosopher of absolute knowledge and truth?

Indeed, Hegel broaches the issue of authenticity—not just in relation to artwork but also to poetic renderings of authentic historical memory and divine truth—as a kind of recipe which requires pure, time-tested ingredients. For

Hegel, truth-testing representations of historical knowledge hinges in part on evaluating the mode of transmission. In the case of poetry, the problem of authentically transmitting truth is complicated by “already formed language” and emotion. Hegel thus prefigures a kind of structuralist critique of language that Jacques Derrida later radicalizes in essays such as “Signature, Event, Context” (*SEC*). In this essay, Derrida attributes the problem of authenticating meaning to the supplemental as well as citational structures of language that render any utterance—verbal or written—a kind of citation of another citation. Even contexts, writes Derrida, are not viable grounds in and of themselves for orienting meaning, as they also depend upon the citational structure of language to find their bearings. Nietzsche staged a similar critique of “emotion” in *Beyond Good and Evil*. Far from an “originary” expression of the inner individual, says Nietzsche, emotion is instead constituted through referential language which can only metaphorically allude to inaccessible and—as far as can be known—non-existent origins. In other words, emotions such as “love” or “desire” are only comprehensible in relation to *objects* of love or desire—objects that are themselves conceptually contingent on citational language.

Hegel’s approach to the problems of authenticity and language is to broach them as questions of judgment in relation to accurate historical reflection. In the very first pages of his preface to the *Philosophy of History* he explains that

the poet operates upon the material supplied him by his emotions; projecting it into an image for the conceptive faculty. These original historians did, it is true, find statements and narratives of other men ready to hand. One person cannot be an eye or ear witness of everything. But

they make use of such aids only as the poet does of that heritage of an already-formed language, to which he owes so much: merely as an ingredient. Historiographers bind together the fleeting elements of story, and treasure them up for immortality in the Temple of Mnemosyne. Legends, Balladstories, Traditions, must be excluded from such original history. These are but dim and hazy forms of historical apprehension, and therefore belong to nations whose intelligence is but half awakened. Here, on the contrary, we have to do with people fully conscious of what they were and what they were about. The domain of reality — actually seen, or capable of being so — affords a very different basis in point of firmness from that fugitive and shadowy element, in which were engendered those legends and poetic dreams whose historical prestige vanishes, as soon as nations have attained a mature individuality. (14-15)

Authentic poetry vs. poetry containing a merely “fugitive and shadowy” account of history are contrasted here in terms of authentic vs. inauthentic uses of language. In other words, while authentic poetry must be written with “already-formed language, to which [the poet and/or original historian] owes so much,” the “authenticity” of the poetry seems to lie, for Hegel, in the way in which language is only a part, or “ingredient,” of the poem’s synthesized truth. The origin to which this “authentic” poetic language refers, says Hegel, is “feeling.” Thus, the quality of feeling of the poet of true history determines their quality of judgment to render poetic works whose truth, over time, will be vindicated by the nation-state. But on closer examination, this reliance on the poet’s feeling for accessing transcendental historical meaning leaves us with a poem whose “already-formed,” or merely citational linguistic structure is an inadequate conduit for relating what Hegel calls in the *Phenomenology of Right* “the relation to the absolute in the form of feeling, imagination, faith” (260). We are also faced with a second problem: of judging authentic vs. inauthentic feelings. For Hegel, the difference



between right and wrong emotions is mediated via negation. In the section on “Wrong” in the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel’s concept of negation applies to individual “feeling,” such that abnormal feelings or unethical desires—when they present themselves in contradiction to the ethical norm—manifest as injuries and/or “dimness and haziness” in regards to historical truth. Thus, the negation of such wrong-headed individual feeling or desire is the canceling out of a negative, which for Hegel thus constitutes a positive. However, Nietzsche’s critique of the linguistic structure of emotion not only throws into question such a negational determination of linguistically-structured “authentic” feelings. It also helps bring into focus the ways in which the *proper* objects of the authentic poet’s feelings, as understood by Hegel, are in fact predetermined by the very citational and/or negational logic of the dialectic which thus becomes the most “authentic” origin of those feelings.

Moreover, as Jacques Derrida points out in *SEC*, the fundamental citational structure of language—its supplemental condition of possibility for signifying meaning—throws into question the clear differentiation between an authentic speech act (or what J. L. Austin calls a “serious” performative utterance) and an inauthentic one. Indeed, as contemporary critics of national literary canons have long argued, it is often only by carefully sifting through the “less serious” textual, aural, epistolary or anecdotal evidence that the more “authentic” character of “literary” and/or cultural production within a particular historical “context” can be gleaned. Indeed, even the idea of an “authentic context” within

which such “evidence” can be properly understood outside the contingencies and citational structures of language becomes elusive after Derrida’s *SEC*. Arguably, Hegel’s nod towards the “already-formed” or citational structure of language can be read, alongside Derrida’s *SEC*, as a throwing into question Hegel’s own hierarchization of authentic vs. inauthentic art. In a nascent way, therefore, Hegel can be understood to broach the structural problematic of language as it applies to historical and artistic judgment—a proto-theoretical approach to language and authenticity that is arguably reflected in his aestheticization of the “great men of history” as spectral portraits in a kind of living, hauntological gallery of world history. Such an aesthetic rendering of “authentic” or “great” historical figures, to borrow Rajan’s critique, leaves their interpretation *open to thought*. Indeed, the way in which those spectral portraits *themselves* move slowly through history suggests that, in a certain way, these “representations” can be understood to be performatively *inaugurating* the very spiritual law to which they reflectively refer. The aestheticized, spectral portrait, in other words, becomes intriguingly indistinguishable from its reflected spiritual idea—a citational reflexivity with “poststructuralist” implications far beyond mere dialectical synthesis. The relentlessly self-reflexive mode of Hegel’s project thus can be seen to fold back on his critique of historical authenticity—particularly in his figure of the world historical portrait gallery—rendering dim and hazy that nationalistic archivization project and casting a shadow over its portrait’s illuminations of Spiritual truth.

*Hegel, Bush and the Family*

Another Hegelian specter haunting contemporary globalization/Empire as it is manifested in the Bush administration's post-9/11 ethical rhetoric is the concept of the family. For Hegel, the family is the first and most "natural" sphere of being. It is the proper realm of the feminine, of mourning work, and of individuality, and is organized around a notional sense of property and ownership. As such, explains Jacques Derrida in *Glas*, the family becomes the very condition of possibility for—as well as the orienting oppositional term at war with—the more "mature" ethical community of the state. It is through education, explains Hegel, that individual family members are able to negate their less ethico-politically mature "loving" ties as family members and embrace the laws, obligations, and subjectivity of state citizenship. According to Hegel's system, the ownership of individuals by their mothers—without whom the birth, or inauguration of the bodily subject into the world would not be possible—must eventually be superseded by the father—or "master"—as the proper communal head over the public sphere of the state. Of course, Hegel's conceptualization of the family—in and through the concept of "property" as the "naturally" reflective signifier signifying "loving community"—already prefigures the negation of loving familial attachment. This is due to the family's supplemental arrangement as *already* an early spherical stage in the evolution of property rights in relation to civic and state organizations of property and individual rights. In other words, the

“natural family,” as Hegel figures it in relation to the secret and overweening economy of Spiritual knowledge, is conceived of as *fundamentally* an early stage in the development of private property and ownership, or as the first step in an elaboration of an individual’s most *proper* place and rights within what eventually culminates as the “true” ethical community of state life.

Not unlike Hegel, Bush conceptualizes the role of the family specifically as a kind of micro-economy subservient to the higher ethical claims of the nation-state which, for him, has the most ethical claim to ownership over the lives of its citizens. But the circulation of this economy of power centered on the very life and death of the citizen is ambivalent and even contradictory, particularly in the post-9/11 context of the war on terror. On the one hand, Bush’s rhetoric holds up the family as a key symbol of American values that the war on terror is trying to protect. On the other hand, when a family member dies in the service of the state, the mourning work undertaken within the realm of the family is contingent, and subject to displacement or negation in the service of idealizing a kind of higher moral sphere of the state. This “higher” death is one for the noble cause of “freedom,” seen as a right attached to state citizenship. The negation of the individual’s singular familial attachments, in other words, is taken as an *exemplary* act of citizenship. The noble act of leaving behind a grieving partner, parents, children, friends, household obligations and pleasures—all of which can be understood as more singularly corporeal or “bodily” forms of individual life and attachment—is ethically justified as a noble *sacrifice* of one’s body for the

more generalized, universalized, and idealistic concept of state citizenship. Yet, by whom, for whom and in whose interests this “generalized, universalized, and ideal” economy of state citizenship is actually operating is less clear—even if it is much more clearly *not* in the interests of family members. And protest against such a propagandistic construction of the “true” meaning of an individual citizen’s death is understood to be unpatriotic—even “evil.” This is one of the implications of Bush’s statement: “you are either for us, or against us.” This “us” clearly implies the U.S. state—certainly not family members who, as citizens, supposedly help to comprise the interests and goals of the imagined community of the state.

An example of how this Hegelian remainder of family values haunts the post-9/11 ethical rhetoric of President Bush is found in his “axis of evil” speech, delivered four days after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. In this speech, he constructs “ideal” American citizenship by conflating the singularity of those individual lives into sublimated symbols of *exemplary American* deaths. This propagandizing of their deaths in the service of the state is, at times, achieved even by referencing their roles as family members. Bush thus takes the private grieving of the family at the death of its members as an occasion for universalizing *all* grief. Reconceptualizing this mourning work as fundamentally centred on *national* loss, Bush rhetorically turns the family tragedy into a “good” death. As he says in his speech,

the men and women of our Armed Forces have delivered a message now clear to every enemy of the United States: Even 7,000 miles away, across

oceans and continents, on mountaintops and in caves -- you will not escape the justice of this nation. (Applause.)

For many Americans, these four months [since the September 11, 2001 attacks] have brought sorrow, and pain that will never completely go away. Every day a retired firefighter returns to Ground Zero, to feel closer to his two sons who died there. At a memorial in New York, a little boy left his football with a note for his lost father: Dear Daddy, please take this to heaven. I don't want to play football until I can play with you again some day.

Last month, at the grave of her husband, Michael, a CIA officer and Marine who died in Mazur-e-Sharif, Shannon Spann said these words of farewell: "Semper Fi, my love." Shannon is with us tonight. (Applause.)

Shannon, I assure you and all who have lost a loved one that our cause is just, and our country will never forget the debt we owe Michael and all who gave their lives for freedom. (President Bush "Axis of Evil Speech" 2002 *State of the Union Address* n.p.)

The ideological contexts of "American" justice and values framing these private snap-shots of grief are clearly designed to *universalize* American deaths as meaningful, just, and as "debts" payable towards the infinite dividends of "freedom"—presumably in another sphere of existence after the individual's death.

There is also an underlying compassionate conservative, evangelical Christian bent to the way in which family values and "service" to a higher authority are conceptualized here. This includes, first, a Hegelian remainder of phallogocentrism which honours yet severely limits the role of the mother as an ethical force in social life; and second, a kind of arrogantly paternalistic "tough-love" approach to a state's responsibilities towards its citizens who are expected to endure hardship and sacrifice for the "greater good." These compassionate conservative values were telegraphed by Bush during the well-publicized scandal involving Cindy Sheehan, the mother of Pfc. Casey Sheehan who was killed

during his tour of duty in the Iraq war. Ms. Sheehan protested the nationalistic motives that led to what she viewed as her son's useless death in the service of American imperialist ambition. Bush, in response, told the press that

I sympathize with Mrs. Sheehan. She feels strongly about her position, and she has every right in the world to say what she believes. *This is America. She has a right to her position* as a mother, and I thought long and hard about her position. I've heard her position from others, which is: 'Get out of Iraq now.' And it would be a mistake for the *security of this country* and the ability to lay the foundations for peace in the long run if we were to do so.<sup>53</sup>

Bush, on the one hand, seems to embrace—even *privilege*—the private familial grief of Pfc. Sheehan's mother as "natural." On the other hand, Bush ultimately dismisses her private grief as a regressive individualism not reflective enough of the severe stakes involved in the higher nationalistic project of regime change in Iraq. In fact, all of the complex issues, private concerns, and singular thought connected with Cindy Sheehan's argument are conflated, by Bush, into a single straw-man argument: "get out of Iraq."

In these ways, the post-9/11 mourning work conducted by the state as represented in Bush's speeches can be understood as a "speaking for" the life of a singularity which can no longer speak for itself in the same way, and is in fact irreducible to a *particular* grievable death. Indeed, who has the right or the authority to speak for the dead, to ontologize remains, to identify the "true" causes, events, proper names and meanings associated with such a death? Indeed,

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<sup>53</sup> <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/08/20050811-1.html> (President Bush, "President Meets with Defense and Foreign Policy Teams" White House Website Press Releases 11 Aug 2005; emphasis added)

if such a “death” is agreed upon and ratified, for example, in the service of a nationally-sanctioned collective mourning work seeking an alibi for retributive violence and state terrorism, is that not akin to a second killing of all but a *certain* ontologized version of an individual’s life, as well as what that life might become in its possible future(s)?

These are questions which are not broached by the post-9/11 ethical rhetoric of the Bush administration. Similarly to Hegel, Bush in the end privileges the nation over the individual—explicitly along gendered and theological lines—universalizing familial grief by construing it as more fundamentally about national grief: it’s not what your country can do for you, in the end, but what you can do for your country. In a certain way, this constitutes a second killing of individuals such as Specialist Sheehan by reducing his memory to a justifiable “death” in the cause of a dubious nationalistic concept of “freedom,” and even worse, by justifying many many more deaths in his name.

#### *The Reminders of Love in Hegel, Hardt, Negri and Bush*

Another Hegelian remainder haunting Hardt and Negri as well as the theocratic ethical rhetoric of President Bush is the concept of love. For Hegel, Bush, Hardt and Negri, love is a kind of utopic concept and/or ethical alibi for justifying particular biopolitical formations of global human community. The spectral remainder of Hegelian familial love—what he calls the “natural,” inaugural sphere of human community—is read by Jacques Derrida as a key term



in Hegel's system on which hinges the very condition of possibility guaranteeing the existence of the whole system, and at the same time is the very thing that Hegel says must be abjected and denied in the attainment of true ethical citizenship within the state. Similarly, as a key Hegelian remainder in the political projects of Hardt and Negri and Bush, love can be read deconstructively as both *binding together* and *tearing apart* those globalized visions of human ethico-political community all at once.

### *Love in a Time of Empire*

For Hegel, familial love is the “natural” prerequisite for life. However, in order to attain the *ideal* ethical form of life—the state—the family must be abandoned. Hardt and Negri's concept of love contains just such a paradoxical Hegelian remainder of love, such that their collectivity of the multitude—as a kind of ethical community drawn together in a common bond of love for fellow humans—depends upon the singular “loves” of its constituent members to bind themselves together as loving members of humanity. At the same time, any *singular* or overly “individualistic” love that contradicts the multitude's common desire to remain together must be quickly abandoned for the greater loving human community of the multitude to function.

This Hegelian remainder of love in Hardt and Negri, however, is also indebted to—and thus brought into dialogue with—Spinoza's affective rendering of love which he introduces in his Christian monist philosophy. For Spinoza,

love—in its pure form—is the pleasurable affect that one mode of infinite being (meaning one variant on the universally conjoined substance of the world—God) has on another. In his words from the *Ethics*, “especially the free man – is drawn by love and humour to seek the company of those whose thoughts and feelings may profitably be joined to his own” (Proposition LXXI, book XVIII:317). Hardt and Negri’s books *Empire* and *Multitude* are roughly structured after Spinoza’s *Ethics*, for example, in their inclusion of “scholie” sections at the ends of proper chapters meant as utopic provocations and problematizations of the more deconstructive mode of argumentation in the opening sections of their chapters. In *Empire*, however, Hardt and Negri distance themselves from Spinoza—specifically along the lines of his concept of love. They explain that

the desire (*cupiditas*) that rules the course of the existence and action of nature and humans is made love (*amor*)—which invests at once both the natural and the divine. And yet, in this final part of the *Ethics*, this utopia has only an abstract and indefinite relation to reality. At times, setting out from this high level of ontological development, Spinoza’s thought does attempt to confront reality, but the ascetic proposal halts, stumbles, and disappears in the mystical attempt to reconcile the language of reality and divinity. Finally, in Spinoza as in the other great modern critics of modernity, the search for an outside seems to run aground and propose merely phantasms of mysticism, negative intuitions of the absolute. (186)

Spinoza’s radical, post-Cartesian philosophy focused on reason and intellectual proofs for its Christian monist understanding of the ontological modes of existence in the world. His philosophy is well known to run aground, however, due to his faulty paradigm of knowledge which takes its own method—of distinguishing “clear and distinct ideas” from the merely human language used to express these ideas—as the *proof* of the viability of this very method. Thus,

explains Roger Scruton, “the reader [of the *Ethics*] can never be certain whether the extraordinary ideas which are brought so compellingly before him are fiction or reality” (*Spinoza*; 41). Yet one can see the appeal of Spinoza’s ethical philosophy for Hardt and Negri who also seek an ontologically grounded, universally applicable ethico-political theory which can serve as the point of departure for their concept of a globalized collectivity of the multitude. Like Spinoza’s “modes” of universal being, the multitude is an attempt to theorize universal human collectivity *and* individual singularity all at once. In this way, Hardt and Negri, particularly via their reading of Spinozian love, can be understood to have certain overarching aims in common with idealist philosophers such as Fichte, Schelling and Hegel.

In spite of their seeming rejection of Spinoza, however, Hardt and Negri take up and refigure his concept of love in relation to their contemporary theory of Empire. This retheorization of Spinozan love is most rigorously worked out in *Empire*’s companion text, *Multitude*. Indeed, the book’s very last word—which thus literally frames their whole explication of the multitude—is love. In the final pages, they write that

people today seem unable to understand love as a political concept, but a concept of love is just what we need to grasp the constituent power of the multitude. The modern concept of love is almost exclusively limited to the bourgeois couple and the claustrophobic confines of the nuclear family. Love has become a strictly private affair. We need a more generous and more unrestrained conception of love. We need to recuperate the public and political conception of love common to premodern traditions. Christianity and Judaism, for example, both conceive love as a political act that constructs the multitude. Love means precisely that our expansive encounters and continuous collaborations

bring us joy. There is really nothing necessarily metaphysical about the Christian and Judaic love of God: both God's love of humanity and humanity's love of God are expressed and incarnated in the common material political project of the multitude. We need to recover today this material and political sense of love, *a love as strong as death*. This does not mean you cannot love your spouse, your mother, and your child. It only means that your love does not end there, that love serves as the basis for our political projects in common and the construction of a new society. Without this love, we are nothing. [...] The primary decision made by the multitude is really the decision to create a new race or, rather, a new humanity. When love is conceived politically, then, this creation of a new humanity is the ultimate act of love. [...] We can already recognize that today time is split between a present that is already dead and a future that is already living—and the yawning abyss between them is becoming enormous. In time, an event will thrust us like an arrow into that living future. This will be the real political act of love. (351-56; emphasis added)

Apropos of a “big finish,” these final pages of the book—like their subject: love—contain a kind of utopian “affectivity” akin to other scholastic-type passages in their books. However, if we read the specters of Spinoza and Hegel back into this section, it becomes a much more serious theorization of love than it first appears and in fact can be understood to encapsulate Hardt and Negri's entire biopolitical theory of the multitude.

To briefly summarize Hardt and Negri's argument: Love, for them, is a kind of utopic, biopolitical glue which through the non-metaphysical metaphysics of “joy” binds together the multitude's singular desires and focuses its “constitutive power” for creating new races and new forms of humanity. In biopolitical terms, the love binding together the multitude is a much more expansive and less heteronormative concept than the contemporary western neoconservative version. It is thus conceptually open to what Michel Foucault

once called those “bodies and pleasures” in excess of a normative bourgeois-racist ideal of love; a neocon version of which President Bush seems still firmly entrenched in. As with Spinoza, Hardt and Negri’s biopolitics of love finds its binding power in a monist, anthropocentric presupposition of what the “clear and distinct idea” of the “joyful” experience of human love is and/or definitively means. It also presupposes that all humans—“especially the free man—[are] drawn by love and honour to seek the company of those whose thoughts and feelings may profitably be joined to his own” (Scruton *Spinoza*; 95). Hardt and Negri’s theory of love also lacks an adequate theorization—outside of their brief mention of cyborgs in *Empire*—of what those new “races” and “humanities” which are love’s bioproducts might look like.

Hardt and Negri’s concept of love is thus a clearly utopic gesture in the most problematic sense. Indeed, Foucault’s provocation at the end of *The History of Sexuality Volume 1* that we should be focusing on “bodies and pleasures” instead of those “repressed” bourgeois categories of human sexuality still seems more contemporary in its rejection of normative “human” concepts than Hardt and Negri’s call to simply re-invent race and humanity anew via one of humanities most bankrupt and self-referential concepts: love.

But there is another specter haunting Hardt and Negri’s concept of love: the specter of Hegel. Indeed, Hardt and Negri explicitly propose a more universalized, “public” conceptualization of love that goes beyond the “confines” of the family. Love, for them, is a political concept—an idea that strongly

resonates with Hegel's view of love as a kind of necessary, natural genesis which must become political (specifically, become the juridico-political form of the state) if it is to attain a truly ethical and Spiritually-relevant existence. Further, as I emphasized in the above passage from *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri say we need today to recover a "material and political sense of love, *a love as strong as death*." The interconnectedness of love, death and mourning in their political project of the multitude is evocative of the Hegelian loving family as the proper sphere of mourning work for the individual. The multitude's evocation of a love as strong as (or rather in dialectical opposition to) death, therefore, recalls the way in which Hegel's concept of love also serves as a kind of basic organizing concept for the ways in which, for him, human community and mourning work are naturally organized. Love, for Hegel, Hardt and Negri, is thus a kind of universalized human "will to biopolitical association"—an association that is ontologically framed via an eschatological concept of death.

But what are the consequences of such a Hegelian remainder of love haunting the multitude's very organizing principle?

What Hegel's concept demonstrates is a kind of logical contradiction in the inaugural moment of the family. The singular family members bound together by natural "love" creates internally-divided political subjects. On the one hand, they are biopolitically bound to their families; yet the love for one's family becomes the site of a kind of master-slave struggle to the death—indeed a perpetual war between the family and the state—over property rights to individual

bodies. This highly political concept of love is thus already operating in Hegel's system, and read against the multitude in Empire, underlines the tension between the multitude's universalization of human love and any singular, non-socially-oriented love that might contradict its internal cohesion as a political entity. The biopolitical *social life* of the multitude is thus inaugurated via its universalization of love—the highest (and thus most human) form of desire which collectivizes and overrides all other singular desires. But what does such a universalized concept of love leave out? One possible danger here is that someone—for example, a neoconservative with no love for those that might be against Empire, or even someone whose defense of their own singular loves has nothing to do with the supposedly globalized threat of Empire—becomes less recognizably “human” in the eyes of the multitude, and thus without even the right to have rights within its loving sovereign association.

### *Love in a Time of Terror*

As a symptom of Empire and thus a key target against which Hardt and Negri's politicized concept of love is directed, the Bush administration's post-9/11 ethical worldview contains its own theologically inflected guiding concept of “love.” This evangelical Christian concept of love, efficacious as a principle for foreign and domestic policy, is best conceptualized as a tenet of “compassionate conservatism.” In his introduction Marvin Olasky's book and his to *Compassionate Conservatism: What It Is, What It Does, and How It Can*

*Transform America* (2000), George W. Bush writes a glowing endorsement of Olasky's account of the tenets of compassionate conservatism, and his evangelical Christian fundamentalist philosophy of government. In Bush's words,

government can do certain things very well, but it cannot put hope in our hearts or a sense of purpose in our lives. That requires churches and synagogues and mosques and charities. A truly compassionate government is one that *rallies these armies of compassion* and provides an environment in which they can thrive. [...] This book clearly summarizes the principles of compassionate conservatism. But by showing how they have already been put into practice, in cities and regions spread far and wide, it offers more. Marvin offers not just *a blueprint for government*, but also an inspiring picture of the great resources of decency, caring, and commitment to one another that Americans share. He shows the difficulties that social entrepreneurs work to overcome, and ways for all of us to help them. Marvin's books provide vital insights for those who want to understand America's past and future. He knows that we can, as a society, do better than we did through programs developed in the 1960s [Bush refers here to what Olasky calls programs designed by "the secularists who dominated the big (social) programs of the past"]. We can make the world more welcoming. We can share our resources—both material and spiritual—with those who need them most. Here's how. (Bush, in Olasky, xiii; emphasis added)

In this passage, Bush makes clear his administration's commitment to following Olasky's Christian fundamentalist philosophy of compassionate conservatism almost as a literal blueprint for foreign and domestic policy-making. Two such compassionate conservative tenets are "tough love" and "changing hearts." The rhetoric of compassionate conservatism, as expounded in Olasky's book and Bush's introduction, is to rally "armies of compassion"—a paradoxical approach to "love" which allows for the use of military might and "necessary evils" as tactics to secure "hearts" and minds in the war on terror. The Hegelian remainder of love as a natural inaugural force of human community which must be



superceded—violently if necessary—by the sovereign authority of the state clearly haunts compassionate conservative love, especially in its Christian character. However, even Hegel’s universalizing notion of the state as existing over and above the loving familial associations of its citizens was contingent upon adherence to a collectively negotiated constitution. As Hegel makes clear in his *Philosophy of History*, “The people,” for him, have to agree with and historically ratify the sovereign authority of the state for it to remain effective and viable. Compassionate conservatism, on the other hand, is haunted by such a “democratic” remainder of Hegel’s concept of governance which seems to contradict Bush’s absolute, theocratic faith in *his own* gut instincts over the more constitutional processes of the nation-state. In short, while familial love, for Hegel and Bush, must be subordinated to the interests of the state for the people to function as a viable sovereign collectivity, singular love is not necessarily evacuated by Hegel’s system, as it clearly has the potential for operating as a kind of “thirdness” which might influence an individual’s participation in the constitution. Bush, on the other hand, merely sublimates “love” to a universalized, evangelical Christian monist concept which never had anything to do with singular individual attachments, but everything to do with the arrogant paternalism characterizing the power dynamics of the Bush-administered state.

*Freedom, 9/11 and the Spectral Reminders of Hegelian Terror*

In many ways, the very concept of a war on terror is precisely Hegelian. The aim of the following few pages is to unpack why this is the case, and what exactly is productive about thinking the current war on terror through its Hegelian remainders of “absolute freedom and terror.” I want to suggest—via a reading of Judith Butler’s critique of the “unhappy consciousness” alongside the ethical rhetoric of the Bush administration—that the post-9/11 concept of “terror” can be understood to be as much about the terrifying effects of universalizing discourses of “humanity” and the ethical limits of globalization as it is about suicide bombers and state-sanctioned retributive violence.

How is our post-9/11 concept of terror haunted by Hegel?

Like the current concept, Hegel understood terror as, on the one hand, a highly abstract concept, and on the other hand, is evocative of actual historical specters of terrorism directed against what are considered to be oppressive state structures. The “great terror” of the French revolution had a clear influence on Hegel’s writing—in particular, on the way in which he unfolds his idea of “unhappy consciousness” in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. A defining feature of the master-slave dialectic, according to Hegel, is the fear of “death.” This denotes the terror of the unknown, which arises during the perpetual war-to-the-death between slave and bondsman and ends up evoking moral truth as a stop-gap against it. Such an evocation of moral certainty, in effect, catalyzes the synthesis of master and slave into sense-certain self consciousness. Hegel describes this

experience as the terrifying dread of a death with “no inner significance or filling [...] the coldest and meanest of all deaths, with no more significance than cutting off a head of cabbage or swallowing a mouthful of water” (360). This imagery, as is well known, is meant to evoke the French “great terror” with its chilling figure of the guillotine and daily executions which—at their peak—became a macabre routine.

In her essay “Stubborn Attachment, Bodily Subjection: Hegel on the Unhappy Consciousness,” (1995) Judith Butler interrogates the unhappy consciousness at the moment of its terrifying glimpse into the abyss of non-self-identification—the terrifying sense-*uncertainty* of death. It is at this point, she argues, that Hegel glimpses the very limits of his own universal system, but mistakes this experience for self-righteous moral self-assurance. Butler’s critique focuses on the passage in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* entitled “Absolute Freedom and Terror.” This terror—which Hegel calls the “sheer terror of the negative”—Butler identifies as the visceral feeling welling up in the very *body* of the Hegelian subject it reaches the limits of sense-certain being via the battle-to-the-death between lord and bondsman. Hegel describes this terrifying experience as

the painful feeling of the Unhappy Consciousness that *God Himself is dead*. This hard saying is the expression of innermost simple self-knowledge, the return of consciousness into the depths of the night in which ‘I’ = ‘I’, a night which no longer distinguishes or knows anything outside of it. This feeling is, in fact, the loss of substance and of its appearance over against consciousness; but it is at the same time the pure *subjectivity* of substance, or the pure certainty of itself which it lacked when it was object, or the immediate, or pure essence. This Knowing is

the inbreathing of the Spirit, whereby Substance becomes Subject, by which its abstraction and lifelessness have died, and Substance therefore has become *actual* and simple and universal Self-consciousness. (476)

In this passage, Hegel can be seen reformulating a very fundamental German idealist philosophical proposition in contrast to its previous formulations by Fichte, as well as by Schelling who expressed it thus: “I is I.” This proposition encapsulates the idealist rejection of Kant’s notion of the “thing in itself,” which he saw as distinct from the possibility of knowledge of such a “thing-ness.” The idealists, however, saw the possibility of knowledge itself as presupposing the possibility of synthesis between *true* knowledge and the substantive being of its object. Hegel’s rethinking of this basic proposition differs from Fichte’s focus on the absolute ego and Schelling’s naturalism, among other ways, in the comprehensiveness of Hegel’s system and in his idea that a subject is only a subject *for another*—an ethical relation always externally mediated by a third term: Spirit.

For Hegel, the proposition “I=I” must overcome its unhappy condition of sense-uncertainty. This unhappiness within the subject arises due to the disparity between its universal existence as an infinite subject of Spirit and its merely finite, individual form of “I” as “I.” True self-knowledge, says Hegel, is only attained through living and is only accomplished in and through death. This is the death of the subject’s “abstraction and lifelessness”—or his finite individuality. Only through death, says Hegel, does the I become free of its evil individuality and attain true Spiritual existence as a “universal Self-consciousness.” Put more

bluntly, in order to attain universal life, one must kill off the singular (Butler calls it the “bodily”) existence of the individual.

In the section “Absolute Freedom and Terror,” Hegel explains that the negation of the individualistic self via absolute freedom obtains in coming face-to-face with the fear of a

death that is without meaning, the *sheer terror of the negative* [emphasis added] that contains nothing positive, nothing that fills it with a content. At the same time, however, this negation in its real existence is not something alien; [...] on the contrary, it is the *universal will* which in this its ultimate abstraction has nothing positive and therefore can give nothing in return for the sacrifice. But for that very reason it is immediately one with self-consciousness, or it is the pure positive, because it is the pure negative; and the meaningless death, the unfilled negativity of the self changes round in its inner Notion into absolute positivity. [...] Absolute freedom has thus removed the antithesis between the universal and the individual will. The self-alienated Spirit, driven to the extreme of its antithesis in which pure willing and the agent of that pure willing are still distinct, reduces the antithesis to a transparent form and therein finds itself. Just as the realm of the real world passes over into the realm of faith and insight, so does absolute freedom leave its self-destroying reality and pass over into another land of self-conscious Spirit where, in this unreal world, freedom has the value of truth. In the thought of this truth Spirit refreshes itself, in so far as *it is* and remains *thought*, and knows this being which is enclosed within self-consciousness to be essential being in its perfection and completeness. There has arisen the new shape of Spirit, that of the *moral* Spirit. (362-63)

The individual’s *universal* existence, Hegel explains in this passage, is thus inaugurated through the terrified subject’s eleventh-hour redemption from a meaningless death in the war between lord and bondsman. This redemption comes to pass by way of the gift of morality, or rather the subject’s discovery that the moral truth of Spirit always already existed within himself all along. The freedom of moral truth is won for the bondsman, ironically, through the very

repressive labour and submission to power that the bondsman was fighting to liberate himself from in the first place. And for the lord, there is a recognition of his complete dependence for his very life and livelihood on the laborer he was about to kill. In this sense, the lord *is* the bondsman, inasmuch as the bondsman is the very condition of possibility for and signatory to the lord's life and works.

Judith Butler unpacks this paradoxical relation between the slave and bondsman. The bondsman, she argues, due to his position as the corporeal signatory to the master's life and works, is thus the very bodily remainder that must be rejected by the master in order to guarantee his mastery. Yet, the body of the bondsman is, at the same time, the very bodily condition of possibility for the master's existence. Butler explains that Hegelian subjection is thus a double-edged proposition: The very conditions under which the bondsman is "repressed" by the lord are, at the same time, the very conditions of possibility allowing for the bondsman's own subjective agency and freedom.

Tarrying with the ambivalent status of the labouring *body* in Hegel's dialectic, Butler explains that "the 'terror' that seizes the bondsman with his recognition of freedom appears to culminate in the simultaneous fabrication of ethical norms and the beratement of the bodily condition of his own life" (174). The terrifying experience of the subject's loss of God as moral compass is, for Hegel, refigured as the very same redemptive experience of gaining freedom *from* such a loss, via the double-negation of dialectical synthesis. Thus, the war to the death between lord and bondsman within the subject pushes the Hegelian "I" to

the very conceptual limits of Hegel's system, at which point Christian moral reason is re-introduced as a kind of *stubborn attachment* to one's own subjection (in the form of moral self-righteousness) in order to stop-gap the terror of sense-uncertainty. Butler observes that these theologically-ordered moral norms both inaugurate and are inaugurated by their own subject. The unhappy consciousness, therefore, is both redeemed by Spirit *and* can be understood to performatively inaugurate the ethical shape of Spirit anew through the subject's individual *embodiment* of Spirit—an embodiment that is the condition of possibility for Spiritual "life."

Butler argues that Hegel prefigures later thinkers of subjection, liberation, freedom and enslavement such as Nietzsche and Foucault by demonstrating "the double-edged implications of 'subjection' [in the ways in which] the bondsman's 'liberation' [is won through] various forms of ethical beratement" (175). From a different direction, Hegel also shows that "if the suppression of the body requires and instrumental movement of and by the body, then the body is inadvertently preserved in and through the instrument of its suppression" (175). Thus, Butler concludes, "a certain self-recognition is derived from the radically tenuous status of the bondsman; it is achieved through the experience of *absolute fear*" (179). The allaying of this terror is gained only "through stubbornness or, rather, through the action by which the terror over bodily death is displaced by a smugness and stubbornness that, in the next chapter, is further revalued as religious self-righteousness. This sanctimonious self is not *without* terror, but it becomes a

reflexivity that is formulated as a kind of self-terrorization” (181). During this process, the bondsman takes the place of the lord and becomes lord over himself. One way of conceptualizing this is that the ideal socio-discursive form of mastery has finally become ontologically manifest as the immanent biopolitical existence of the subject. Looked at in this way, the resonances between Hegel’s schematization of universality and Hardt and Negri’s are inescapable. Yet Hegel’s now conscious subject, even after the redemptive experience of being freed through moral Spirit, is still torn, still somehow unhappy.

But why does this newfound freedom from “repression” remain unfulfilling? Butler’s explanation departs from Hegel in her reading of the unhappy consciousness through a Foucauldian-inflected understanding of power-dynamics. In Butler’s words,

the fabrication of norms from (and against) fear, and the reflexive imposition of those norms, subjects the unhappy consciousness in a double sense: the subject is subordinated to norms, but the norms are also subjectivating, that is, they give an ethical shape to the reflexivity of this emerging subject. [...] Absolute fear is thus displaced by the absolute law that, paradoxically, reconstituted the fear as a fear *of* the law” (182).

The subject of the Hegelian ethical law finds both bondage and possible subjective agency in that very subjectivizing law. The Hegelian subject, for Butler, is thus coextensive with the law. The subject’s bodily existence or labour performatively inaugurates the moral law by embodying it, and likewise, the moral law allows the body an intelligible and/or “livable” subjective existence. In this way, says Butler, “in Hegel, the suppression of bodily life is shown to require the very body that it seeks to suppress; in this sense, the body is preserved in and



by the very act of suppression” (192). Butler sees the Hegelian dialectic as thus prefiguring the Foucauldian critique of subjection/repression. According to Butler, however, Foucault’s model departs from Hegel’s such that for Foucault,

the suppression of the body does not merely require and produce the very body it seeks to suppress. It goes further by extending the domain of the regulatable body, proliferating sites of control, discipline, and suppression. In other words, the body *presumed* by the Hegelian explanation is incessantly produced and proliferated in order to extend the domain of juridical power. In this sense, the restrictions placed on the body not only *require* and *produce* the body they seek to restrict, but *proliferate* the very domain of the bodily beyond the domain targeted by the original restriction. In what many have come to see as a finally utopian gesture in Foucault, this proliferation of the body by juridical regimes beyond the terms of dialectical reversal is also the site of possible resistance. (193)

The Hegelian dialectic—read by Butler through Foucault—can thus be understood to contain a nascent, subversive critique of power. This is because the very subjectifying moral law instituted to ward off “terror” and “evil individuality” may actually be itself the thing that is terrorized and twisted in the subject’s performative accorporation of the law.

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A provocation: Is the normative post-9/11 figure of the “terrorist,” when read alongside Butler’s critique of Hegel, identifiable as the berated, abjected body of the bondsman within the “unhappy consciousness” of globalization?

Butler’s reading suggests just such a double-edged understanding of the demonized terrorist—at least as constructed in the dominant post-9/11 ethical rhetoric of the Bush administration. Indeed, one possible meaning of 9/11 is that it represents one of the “worst” and most potentially apocalyptic outcomes of

globalization/Empire. The implication of such an idea is that globalization *terrorizes itself* from within. As David Simpson points out in *9/11: The Culture of Memorialization*, “Hegel’s master-slave paradigm reappears in modified form as the democracy-terror syndrome: democracy makes terror in order to consolidate its own identity as unitary and internally consistent” (138).

Simpson’s extraordinary suggestion here is that democracy—specifically, a universalized western humanist concept of democracy presently being globalized via the war on terror—is not only *productive* of terror, but *requires it* as a consolidating condition of its own identity. Another nuance is that “globalization/Empire” is itself the law to which we are, particularly since 9/11, obligated to refer when we conceptualize the terrorist “other.” The terrorist—to borrow Alain Badiou’s almost mathematical formulation of ethics—is thus the radical, unforeseeable “evil” element that disrupts the carefully ordered moral system, or *événement*, of globalization/Empire. This interruption of evil, however, has the productive effect of *changing* that very ethico-political worldview. Such a reading of the post-9/11 terrorist, I argue, is prefigured by Hegel as the unhappy consciousness’s experience of the “terror of absolute freedom” whose stubborn attachment to moral sense-certainty is thus both its enabling condition of possibility as well as its most potentially disastrous self-delusion.

The war on terror can thus be understood to resemble a kind of Hegelian war within globalization/Empire’s unhappy consciousness as it runs up against its

own terrifying ethical limits. Since 9/11, Empire is now forced to stare into the abyss of its uncertain present and future(s) to come. The impact of 9/11 as an exemplary “event” in fact obtains in part to how it is a symptom of contemporary globalization’s increasing inability to contain and manage its own excessive alterities that are now tearing it apart from within like a car bomb. This is why the “war on terror” is *necessarily* a perpetual war: It is being fought, in one sense, by “Empire” within and against *itself* via a highly abstract notion of “terror.” This terror, however, is in fact the abjected other and thus the orienting oppositional moral concept against which Empire constitutes itself. This epic battle within Empire, read through Hegel, can thus be understood as an example of the battle to the death between lord and bondsman in order to ward off the terrifying experience of uncertainty over what lies beyond its own eschatological limits. This terror is thus identifiable as a fear of what lies beyond that “end of history” that in 1989 neoconservatives like Francis Fukuyama were so triumphantly heralding. The death drive within American-led globalization/Empire—the result of its conceptual stasis as an “end of” discourse of history—has caused “globalization” (whatever this actually means) to be the de facto target for radical alterities struggling for recognition within and/or the destruction of this global hegemony. In fact, this is precisely the premise underlying Hardt and Negri’s concept of the multitude. The war on terror, however, can also be understood to function *performatively* in its very historical unfolding. Even as it violently imposes “freedom” and “democracy” across the globe, the meanings of these concepts are

inevitably changed. Likewise, the global ethical climate in which freedom and democratic values are judged is also changing. In short, the war on terror—as a symptom of the perpetual state of war within globalization/Empire to reinforce its own hegemony—is becoming, in many ways has always been, a war *of* terror.

*Is George W. Bush one of the “Great Men of History?”*

In spite of the auto-deconstructive aspects in Hegel’s philosophy, it has also been construed (for example, via Kojève) as an argument for the expansion of global Empire by aggressive states such as the U.S. Even Hegel’s portrait gallery of world history in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* depicts a martial progress of Spirit. In Hegel’s words, one by one through history, “one Spirit relieve[s] another of its charge and each took over the empire of the world from its predecessor” (492). If the portraits in Hegel’s gallery are of the “great men of history,” is George W. Bush’s portrait destined to be among them?

This is the question broached in Scott McLemee’s article “The Great Man Theory.” McLemee measures President Bush’s Presidential record against the yardstick of Hegel’s criterion for greatness in *The Philosophy of History*.

McLemee observes that Hegel’s great men of history

do what they have to do. If that means abandoning multilateral diplomacy or treating the right of *habeas corpus* as something that belongs in a museum of quaint ideas, so be it. [...] [Furthermore,] they can go it alone. They have no use for the “reality-based community.” [Finally,] the World-Historical leader must be single-minded. He is, as Hegel explains, “not so unwise as to indulge a variety of wishes to divide his regards. He is devoted to the One Aim, regardless of all else. It is even possible that such men may treat other great, even sacred interests, inconsiderately;

conduct which is indeed obnoxious to moral reprehension. But so mighty a form must trample down many an innocent flower – crush to pieces many an object in its path. (McLemee, n.p.)

McLemee stops short of drawing any conclusions about whether or not Bush measures up to Hegel's great historical men, a list that includes Julius Caesar and Napoleon Bonaparte. Perhaps a more productive way of reading McLemee's article, however, is as an occasion for considering some of the ways in which Hegel's very phallogocentric, militaristic, and theocratic criterion for "greatness" *haunts* George W. Bush's own historical legacy. In this way, Bush serves as an example of the more nefarious aspects of Hegel's "great man" theory, as well as the ways in which it contains a kind of auto-deconstructive critique of how we judge historical "greatness," the qualities of effective leadership, and the problematic (and usually phallogocentric) notion of "historical genius" that somehow achieves apart from the contextual, technological, historical, and conceptual conditions of possibility for being "great." One might ask: great in whose image, for whom, and in whose interests? Indeed, Hegel's concept of greatness presupposes a western theological notion of *the* great man as its guiding principle—the Christian God as the proper subject of history which therefore should be read as His autobiography.

One person who would likely dispute the idea that President Bush is one of the "great man of history" is Francis Fukuyama. In his recent book *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy* (2006), Fukuyama distances himself from the Bush administration's version of

“neoconservatism” and its failures as official policy in connection with the war on terror and the war in Iraq in particular. At the same time, Fukuyama offers a prescription for how *his* neoconservative ideas *can* still cure humanity’s ills after 9/11. But in spite of his assertions that latter-day neocons like Bush have simply gotten it all wrong, Fukuyama’s re-imagining of neoconservatism as “realist Wilsonianism” seems suspiciously reflective of Bush’s own “innovation” of melding political realism and Wilsonian moralism. Is Fukuyama right that Bush’s real failure is his perversion of transcendental neoconservative “ideals” which should have “ended history” in 1989? Or has there *always* been a fundamental contradiction between Fukuyama’s triumphalist neo-Hegelian idealization of globalization and the ways in which it has historically unfolded? In short, is President Bush disqualified from historical greatness due to his *lack* of neoconservative values, or *because* of those very values?

The problem with making such a determination is that Fukuyama’s standards for judging historical greatness are self-referential—he simply understands neoconservative values to be synonymous with historical greatness. Thus, when those very values are found to be contradictory or destructive, this is taken to be a problem with correctly interpreting and/or implementing those ideal values. Such an ethico-political self-referentiality at the core of neoconservative globalization/Empire gets closer to the larger problems with that dominant discourse and its post-9/11 discontents.

Another possible Hegelian criterion on which to judge Bush's "historical greatness" is via the concept of freedom. Hegelian freedom is not simply translatable as blind submission to the State. For, Hegel qualifies, "even obedience—lordly power, and the fear inspired by a ruler—in itself implies some degree of voluntary connection" (46) involving an evolving and democratically arrived at constitution. Nonetheless, the similarities between Hegel's concept of freedom—as the end goal of historical progress whereby Spirit finally ascends "the throne of the world"—and Bush's equally imperialistic idea of freedom—as the militaristic, political and economic drives to defeat terror and impose a global hegemony of western democracy—came starkly into focus in a June 29, 2004 *New York Times* photograph of a memo President Bush passed to Condoleezza Rice during a 2004 NATO summit in Istanbul. In response to her news that Iraq had become sovereign, Bush passed Rice a note in reply that read "let Freedom reign!"<sup>54</sup> Bush's note mis-quotes Martin Luther King's line "let freedom *ring*." The original words, as spoken by King, refigure the sound of freedom as synonymous with the toll of the American liberty bell. This image reimagines the liberty bell as a universalized church-bell calling people of all races, creeds, and colours to come together in spite of their differences into the house of God. Bush's note, while it too conflates theological belief and the symbols of the state,

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<sup>54</sup> Marc Redfield refers in a footnote to his essay "War On Terror" to a media report in which this Bush quote came to light. Redfield writes that his "[...] source is the *Los Angeles Times*, June 29, 2004, A10, 'A Brief Note Upends NATO Summit in Istanbul')[.] Bush was passed a note by Condoleezza Rice: "Mr. President, Iraq is sovereign. Letter was passed from Bremer at 10:26 AM Iraq time—Condi". Bush scrawled on the note: 'Let Freedom Reign!' The idea of freedom

reconfigures King's sentiments in pointedly militaristic, American exceptionalist terms. King's line, while it evokes a certain Christian-centric humanist ethics, nonetheless imagines a *peaceful* means for overcoming differences and class conflicts via the Christian church. Bush's changing the word *ring* to *reign* instead serves to underscore the militarism and imperialistic intent as the force-of-law driving the war on terror's *imposition* of "freedom" and western democratic values, economics and governance on the whole world.

Similarities aside, no serious Hegelian scholar would identify Bush as a "great man of history." Nonetheless, the many ways in which his post-9/11 historical record resembles Hegel's criteria underscores the limitations both of Bush's and Hegel's universalizing worldviews. Further, the comparison makes even clearer the fundamental philosophical problems that Hegel so eruditely worked through, yet was finally unable to resolve in his system. These same problems arguably still underlie contemporary neoconservative-style globalization and its most dominant current symptom, the Bush administration's ethico-political rhetoric and the war on terror.

### *Coda*

In this chapter, I have interrogated the spectral Hegelian remainders haunting contemporary globalization/Empire and its most dominant current symptoms: the post-9/11 ethico-political rhetoric of the Bush administration and

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reigning rather than ringing is a nice touch, utterly unintended by the president, one imagines, but



its global war on terror. My critique took up what I saw as the spectral remainders of Hegel in the very terms of post-9/11 ethical discourse, to wit: the concepts of freedom, love, family, the state, moral terror, and his “great man” theory of World History.

But what are the implications—indeed the possible “futures”—of such a Hegelian reading of post-9/11 ethics?

Interrogating the Hegelian specters haunting the ethical rhetoric of 9/11 in contemporary globalization/Empire sets this hegemonic universalist project in relief against its much more rigorous intellectual foundations in German idealism. The benefits of such a comparative analysis are several: On the one hand, Hegel’s project was clearly a failed one—perhaps an early warning sign for future universalizing worldviews?—as evidenced by the way in which history has continued to change and “progress” far past its “end point” as imagined within his system. On the other hand, rethinking Hegel’s project in light of contemporary globalization demonstrates the irrepressibility of the idealist’s positivistic drive to understand the universal and/or account for “everything that there is.” What Hegel’s legacy also provides us is an exhaustively rigorous, self-reflexive approach to universality which is still arguably the best philosophical critique of the conditions of possibility for imagining globalization. The spectral remainders of Hegel’s critique, therefore, when traced in the theocratic universalist project of the Bush administration, in the end refuses the very fundamental assumption’s of

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appropriate to the fictionality and ambiguity of Iraqi ‘sovereignty’” (Redfield 12, n. 19).

Bush's ethical rhetoric, and holds it to such a high standard of self-reflexivity that its inconsistencies and dangerous tendencies are brought clearly into focus.

My next chapter will interrogate the ways in which different forms of media disseminate post-9/11 ethical rhetoric. My critique, however, will focus on one particularly rich example, the Hollywood film *United 93*. This film encapsulates an array of different types of media, new media and mediatic genres, all of which are employed for propping up a particular ethico-political discourse of "truth" about the events of 9/11. As such, the film serves as an example *par excellence* of how post-9/11 ethics and the "reality effects" they evoke are disseminated in various ways within and through the globalized context of media.

## Chapter 4

### Echographies of Evil: Adapting Terror, Framing Fear and Post-9/11 Film

#### Adaptation—Paul Greengrass's *United 93*

This chapter is both a continuation of the previous chapters' "hauntological" projects of interrogating post-9/11 ethical rhetoric in *Empire*, as well as a slight departure in focus from those chapters. While my project so far has been to close read President Bush's ethical rhetoric against major philosophers of ethics and globalization such as Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in order to understand its "global" ethico-political implications, this chapter instead turns its gaze towards a more "popular" manifestation of post-9/11 ethics as negotiated in and through the media and film.

Post-9/11 film, media and new media are complex, interrelated topics which are difficult to define. They are nonetheless crucial aspects of how our contemporary global "ethical climate" is being negotiated—particularly in the ways in which they collectively represent a major front in the war on terror. This chapter, therefore, approaches them by focusing on one poignant example which circumscribes all these elements via what I call its film adaptation of "originary" media and new media representations of the September 11, 2001 United Airlines flight 93 disaster: Paul Greengrass' *United 93*. This film—as marketed on its official website, promotional materials, and in the extra materials and footage provided as part of its DVD release—conceptualizes itself as a kind of 9/11

memorial project honouring those “heroes” and “victims” of the September 11, 2001 United Airlines Flight 93 hijacking and crash. The brave efforts of a number of passengers to overpower their hijackers and retake the airplane ended in the deaths of all those aboard, but seems to have scuttled a potentially even more disastrous suicide mission, apparently part of the coordinated terrorist activities executed on September 11. Those brave acts guaranteed the lionization of all the passengers of United 93 as full-fledged American heroes and martyrs. The film purports to—in the words of the official website—offer a “real-time” “meticulous reenactment of events.” The particular *ways* in which the film goes about this, however, draws on an array of cinematic genres, techniques, styles and devices for creating a particular “reality effect” surrounding the events. This chapter investigates the underlying methods and meanings operating just beneath the “tain” of this so-called meticulous *real*-time mirror being held up to those events by reading *United 93* as a *film adaptation* of the “truth” about 9/11.

Approaching *United 93* as a film adaptation takes into consideration the ways in which it is a bricolage of other media sources—the cell phone calls, blackbox recordings, radio transmissions, even video footage—which have already rendered the so-called “originary” events of that doomed flight into mediatized events. Secondly, calling the film an adaptation draws attention to the highly “cinematic” nature of the so-called “real” events and evidence from which the film is drawing. As Baudrillard and Žižek remind us, 9/11 happened *to* us as much on television as it did at the World Trade Center or the Pentagon.

Furthermore, reading the film as an adaptation accomplishes several other related things. First, it foregrounds not *what* truths the film uncovers, but *how* it represents and/or adapts that supposed “first-hand” evidence. Secondly, in a fashion similar to previous chapters, the concept of film adaptation allows for a “hauntological” approach to post-9/11 ethics as disseminated by and through media—an approach that is particularly apt given the ways in which the language of spectrality resonates with the film’s project of memorialization and mourning work for the victims of *United 93*. Third, the concept of adaptation serves as a useful framework for elucidating how the film strategically selects and re-frames its source materials in order to create a particular discursive rendering of the “truth” about 9/11. Instead of a simple retelling of the story (as if this were possible), *United 93* offers a highly *spectral*—by which I mean an irreducibly mediated—ethically and ideologically charged vision of reality that is meant to stand in for “reality itself.”

Finally, the conceit of film adaptation makes clear the ways in which *United 93* can be interrogated along the lines of Judith Butler’s and Susan Sontag’s critiques of filmic “evidence” and its embedded discursive properties. Butler’s essay “War, Photography, Outrage” illuminates the ways in which photography and film ethically and ideologically frames its subject matter. One way *United 93* does this is by capitalizing on the highly charged ethical climate surrounding 9/11. It also does this by deploying different generic film effects of “realism,” such as the use of shaky camera techniques and relatively unknown

actors, giving the impression that “we” (the film’s carefully constructed ideal viewers) are witnessing real people and events, and yet refusing any substantial glimpse into their singular identities. Thus, the film offers us the illusion that we are collectively sharing the truth about these images of terror, neatly edited and packaged for our moral consumption on the big screen.

A key assumption that this chapter makes—particularly via my reading of Blanchot’s *The Writing of the Disaster* alongside *United 93* in the latter sections of this chapter—is the more than coincidental relationship between Blanchot’s concept of the disaster and the cinematic genre of the Hollywood disaster movie. The deeper ethical, historical and conceptual link between these two concepts—aside from the homonym—is their shared focus on “the worst,” even if they approach the worst from completely different directions. On the one hand, Blanchot’s disaster is historically linked with the Holocaust, which—until September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001—was considered a kind of ethical benchmark for “the worst” or ultimate evil. The generic Hollywood disaster movie, on the other hand, renders the impossibly complex, radical concept of “the worst” or “the disastrous” in Blanchot into a moralistic meta-narrative—in short, into a formula for *calculating* (not complicating) the worst. Interrogating *United 93*’s instrumentalization of the disaster genre—in part via its adaptation from the archival teletechnologies of “globalization” and the global media system as “source texts”—thus serves to map a recent shift since September 11, 2001 in the very concept of the disaster. This shift in the western ethical notion of “the

worst” is from a pre-9/11 privileging of the Holocaust as *the* example of the “ultimate evil” to a kind of post-9/11 moral coding of the “ultimate evil” as “terror.” Likewise, the concept of “the terrorist” is coded—for example, via films such as *United 93*—in American exceptionalist terms and according to particular racial, religious, ethnic, classist and gendered categories as someone who visits “the worst” evil (or the moralistic concept of the disaster) upon humanity, and who therefore must be eradicated if there is to be a “happy ending.”

Each section of the chapter takes up a different way in which this film creates its effects of “truth about 9/11,” including the film’s “ethical framing” techniques; its employment of particular generic motifs such as the Hollywood disaster genre and stylistic elements from documentary film; and finally, the ways in which these conventional, moralistic elements of film genre are haunted by alternative specters of the disaster and filmic evidence, such as those represented in the work of Walter Benjamin, Maurice Blanchot, Judith Butler, David Simpson and Susan Sontag.

### *Real-izing Terror*

A major element of *United 93*’s affective impact is its “documentary look.” This is achieved by its shaky hand-held camera technique, the raw environmental lighting effects, and its unpolished sense of “realism.” However, while the film’s “realistic” rendering of events is emotionally and ideologically loaded in the extreme, those “real” events themselves are beyond anyone’s ability

to accurately reconstruct. As the controversy over the Official Report of the 9/11 Commission attests, we will never know the truth about 9/11 once-and-for-all. Yet, like a cipher or Spiritual medium, *United 93* offers just that: a glimpse beyond the grave, beyond the disintegrated context of the “disaster,” and into the unknowable truth about what really happened on September 11, 2001 on United Airlines Flight 93. For many still reeling from the trauma of 9/11 at the time of the film’s release five years later, the promise of such a definitive reconciliation with “reality” might have seemed irresistible. The film, in fact, goes beyond a kind of docudrama-type speculation about what may have really happened to United Airlines flight 93, and seems to offer itself up as an almost “sacred supplement,” filling a presumed moralistic need for, or *lack* of, “reality itself.” In some ways, for certain viewers, it *becomes* that event.

The seeming moral “lack” or “depthlessness” so often associated with “postmodern Reality” that has arguably led to the current melding of the real and the virtual is a favorite theme of Jean Baudrillard’s and one he takes up directly in relation to cinema. As he observes in *The Lucidity Pact: The Intelligence of Evil*,

the films produced today are merely the visible allegory of the cinematic form that has taken over everything—social and political life, the landscape, war, etc.—the form of life totally scripted for the screen. This is no doubt why cinema is disappearing: because it has passed into reality. Reality is disappearing at the hands of the cinema and cinema is disappearing at the hands of reality. A lethal transfusion in which each loses its specificity. (125)

For Baudrillard, the world used to be thought of or experienced as “real,” but largely because of what we loosely understand as “globalization” (and in



particular its technological forms as “media”) it is ceasing to be so. And while the world is not yet fully virtual, for Baudrillard it is fast becoming that way (Baudrillard 34). But what can he mean by this, and what is at stake in such a melding of cinema and reality?

Baudrillard’s subvention of cinema and reality to the point of being indistinguishable is perhaps only strategic. But what exactly is the productivity of such a strategy? Can it have something to do with what Slavoj Žižek, drawing on Baudrillard, sees as compelling about the World Trade Center disaster—the way in which that “event” occurred, according to him, as “an image, a semblance, an ‘effect’, which, at the same time, delivered ‘the thing itself’” (19)? Is there, indeed, a Real “thing itself” whose kernels can now be calculated and located more and more even in cinematic or virtual-reality effects, as Žižek seems to suggest? While such an argument is not unproductive, I am not convinced by it, nor am I convinced that Baudrillard is saying something similar.

Much more convincing, I find, is the idea that Baudrillard’s rather “ecstatic” critique can be read as an illumination of how reality has always been a kind of effect, and how it has always had much in common with the way contemporary cinematic effects likewise often draw upon “reality effects” for “framing” themselves as ethico-politically relevant, believable, and/or “authentic.” What Baudrillard arguably incites us to ask is *by whom, for whom, and in whose interests* are these effects of everyday “reality”—and likewise cinematic reality effects—being produced and proliferated? Such questions are

complicated even further by what Baudrillard calls the “disneyfication” of the “whole context of life” (Baudrillard 125). Indeed, many observers note that their *hyper-real* experiences of watching the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Towers in New York—whether in person or via media coverage of the event—were not only like watching a cinematic production, but like watching a *B-grade movie*. In other words, not even entirely believable by what have become more and more normativized Hollywood standards of what counts as “realistic.”<sup>55</sup>

Indeed, the stakes of ascertaining what counts as intelligible, viable “reality” in our post-9/11 “society of the spectacle” were brought starkly into focus by former White House correspondent Ron Suskind. In a now infamous *New York Times* article, he quotes a Bush administration spokesman who informs the veteran journalist that “we, [meaning the U.S. government] are an Empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality.” Alternatively, those in the “Reality-based community”—meaning “judicious [studiers] of discernible reality” like Suskind—“will be left to just study what we do.”<sup>56</sup> What these arrogantly elitist statements confirm is that the current status of reality has become, particularly since 9/11, a more and more intensely contested question with global implications for how humanity and its others collectively negotiate what counts and doesn’t count as normative and even livable life. A key site in which this

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<sup>55</sup> See Wheeler Winston Dixon, *Film and Television after 9/11*, which cites producer Lawrence Wright’s comment that “the events of 9/11 were ‘cinematic in a kind of super-real way. It was too Hollywood. We could have never used [the tower attacks] in *The Siege*. It would be too impossible’” (9).

<sup>56</sup> The link to the full article is available here:  
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/17/magazine/17BUSH.html>>.

contestation is playing out, I argue, is in and through Hollywood films like *United 93*. Such mass media spectacles as this film function to frame for a wide segment of the global population their experiences, memories and mourning work around what counts as the “real events” of 9/11 and its aftermaths within specific contextual, ethical and political limits.

But can a “Hollywood film” be thought of as the site of a global contestation over livable human life?

Indeed, it is the “meticulous” valuation of what is heroic (American) “life” as opposed to demonized terrorist “death” that this film not only engages in, but also supplementally reifies as *the truth* for many of the victims families, as its DVD documentary feature clearly shows. This type of collaboration with the families, as well as the involvement and even appearances in the film of actual participants in the “real events,” lends credibility to *United 93* as a kind of cipher of 9/11 truth. The Hollywood “dream factory” in which it was produced is another key element in this equation, as it is comprised of gigantic mass media conglomerates which control every aspect of media production, distribution, advertising, and infrastructure. As a tight group of “first tier” transnational players, Hollywood literally monopolizes every aspect of the ideological mechanisms of global media for millions of moviegoers. This, too, can be a persuasive “reality effect.”

However, these reality effects can be read as themselves multiple, heterogeneous “specters” of the events surrounding doomed United Airlines

Flight 93. By this, I mean that the disaster refuses any cohesion of its fragmentary, disparate parts—its *specters*—all of which have a certain claim on “reality”—the *Spirit* of the “event” itself. Yet, there is no conclusive reality left to own. Reality—or the normative frames of reference which are the conditions of possibility for “reality”—is consumed by the disaster.

As an adaptation of different “originary” sources of media—such as cell phone calls, black-box recordings, news video clips, and interview materials—*United 93* can thus be understood in hauntological terms as the spectral rendering of—and even as a kind of transformative mourning work around—an elusive and ultimately inaccessible source or “Spirit” being conjured. The concept of hauntology, which I have elaborated on in previous chapters, is one of Jacques Derrida’s classic “double” gestures which circumscribes a homonym in French between ontology—the non-material materialization of specters—and hauntology—the non-phenomenological phenomenality of a Spirit. Hauntology implies a thinking of history and memory involving the invocation of a supposedly authentic, originary “Spirit” of the “thing itself,” yet whose very condition of possibility obtains in and through all of its multiple, heterogeneous specters—there are always more than one, asserts Derrida—which collectively comprise that Spirit and allow it to *live on* as a supplemental concept or memory.

Reading *United 93* as a film adaptation thus raises some key *hauntological* concerns regarding the conceptual limits of adaptation as a supposed “authentic” rendering of an original. For example, the very concept of adaptation evokes a

kind of spectral economy of *reflection* whereby subject and object are understood to harmonize with each other, resulting in an ontologically “pure” rendering of the original. However, this seeming reflective rendering is actually a supplement standing in for the *absence* of the original. In other words, the copy stands in for the *non-presence* of the original—it is the copy of a copy—and thus performatively reinaugurates the “original” anew via the spectral economy of adaptation. As such, even the “original” is implicated in this logic of supplementarity, in which it becomes clear that there never was any access to “originary,” but only supplements of other supplements in an infinite signifying chain of *différance*. Even so-called “original” media productions are consignations of borrowed language, stories, generic effects, technologies, intertextual resonances, and a host of other supplemental “sources.”

The cell phone calls, black box recordings, transcripts of radio transmissions, second-hand interview materials and “official” reports related to United Airlines Flight 93 are likewise all highly-mediated productions whose meanings are contingent upon many unstable and/or radically contingent factors, such as: the accuracy of transcriptions; the quality of transmissions; the limitations of telecommunications technology; speculation regarding fuzzy sound reproduction; possible tampering; selection; emotionally charged “memories” straining to remember events after the fact; language and discourse; to name a few. That said, a *hauntological* thinking of *United 93*’s adaptation of these sources implies some very different concerns than a strict *e-valu(e)-ation* of

“evidence.” These include a focus on the “event-ness” of this event, by which I mean the *conditions of possibility* for “knowledge” about such events; a concern with the hidden economies and structures determining what counts as “truth” as opposed to “conspiracy theories” surrounding the event; as well as a concern with the conceptual limits of assigning “proper” meanings, dates, names, places and ideas to such an irreducible event. Hauntology also implies a rethinking of history, such that it is seen as a kind of conceptual reality effect that, in fact, is multiple, heterogeneous, and irreducible to any given spectral version of history.

Finally, hauntology is a way of talking about ghosts as *revenants*—in this case, the ghosts of those lost in connection with the United 93 disaster who, via spectral “mediums” such as the film *United 93*, can be understood to transgress their eschatological limits and *return* as part of our collective and individual memories of those events. Jacques Derrida stipulates that ghosts in fact begin by returning, as they are only ever comprehensible via what Hegel called “already formed language.” By whom, for whom, and in whose interests those “deaths” are conceived of as such, and how they can possibly be named, ontologized and “buried” once-and-for-all when those “lives” so clearly live on as singular yet irreducible interruptions into our thoughts and memories are also hauntological questions demanded of us by the ghosts of *United 93*. Adaptation, conceived of as a kind of hauntological practice, is thus never adequate to its own concept. Instead, it represents an often imperceptible politics of “authenticity”—a politics that is concomitantly an implied ethical limit over how closely it is understood to

either stray from or faithfully reproduce the truth of its originary source and still do justice to its memory. On the other hand, *United 93*—as a kind of adaptive cinematic work of mourning—nonetheless helps to ensure that those irreducibly singular lives cut short in the crash might nonetheless survive it in multiple, heterogeneous ways. For example, irregardless of the film’s implied “intent,” the spectral representations of those involved in the United 93 disaster which it “brings to life” are, via the film, allowed to work on and through us—for instance, as irreducible calls to rigorously and responsibly grapple with how the film does or does not do justice to their memories.

### *Framing Fear*

A tactic employed by *United 93* to help authenticate its particular “reality effect” is the technique of “ethical framing.” This technique has recently been the subject of critiques by Judith Butler, David Simpson and Susan Sontag on different aspects of the media’s role in the war on terror, including “embedded journalism,” memorial photo spreads in news media, as well as the Abu Ghraib photographs. Ethical framing most commonly refers to the ways in which photographs can be understood to contain embedded critiques of their subject matter such that the arrangement of images, inclusion and exclusion of particular contextualizing elements, and how the photograph is composed can give the impression that certain aspects of the photo are “normal” or “abnormal,” “proper” or “improper” to the picture as presented. I argue that this technique is also

employed by other forms of media, such as film. In particular, I argue that *United 93* uses ethical framing techniques to normativize certain stereotypical traits of terrorists, “American heroes” and “foreigners.”

Susan Sontag, in her last book, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), which is on the subject of photographic images of atrocity—argues that “the photographic image, even to the extent that it is a trace (not a construction made out of disparate photographic traces), cannot be simply a transparency of something that happened. It is always the image that someone chose; to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude” (46). The ethico-political dynamics of such embedded photographic framing is only intensified in cinematic forms of media, particularly in film adaptations such as *United 93*. Judith Butler and David Simpson, both drawing on Sontag’s book, interrogate the ways in which images connected with 9/11 and the War on Terror are “framed” in particular ways in order to produce embedded arguments. This is the case, they argue, even when these same images or media representations are judged to be unmediated interruptions of the “truth,” or subversive disruptions in accepted “official” accounts of events.

Unlike Sontag, who views photography merely as “selective” and thus in need of interpretation—for example, via explanatory captions—Judith Butler argues in her essay “Photography, War, Outrage” that photography on the topic of the war on terror, like the phenomenon of embedded reporting, are examples of how “a political back-ground is being explicitly formulated and renewed through



the frame. In this sense, the frame takes part in the interpretation of the war compelled by the state; it is not just a visual image awaiting its interpretation; it is itself interpreting, actively, even forcibly” (823). In spite of the outrage caused by their release, Butler suggests that “in the Abu Ghraib photographs, the camera angle, the frame, the posed subjects all suggest that those who took the photographs were actively involved in the perspective of the war, elaborating that perspective and even giving it further validity” (822). The “outrage,” in other words, is contained and managed by framing the photos within an implied Afghan context in which the war footing is the norm, and the fighters (if abused) are nonetheless *apparently* soldiers and/or terrorists, as opposed to everyday citizens who go to school, go to work, go out to the movies or to the coffee shop in this same local.

David Simpson adds to this debate in his recent book *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration* (2006). He argues that the type of politically charged work of 9/11 memorialization operating in the photographs of those who died in the World Trade Center attacks as depicted in the *New York Times*’ photo series “Portraits of Grief” has

been parlayed into an unjustified and internationally condemned military and political adventurism that not only arguably dishonors the dead in profound ways but also endangers the living across much of the world. The dead, in other words, have been framed [both cinematically and as innocent dupes] to the purpose of justifying more deaths. (88)

Simpson’s reading of how certain forms of post-9/11 memorialization play out as alibis for even more state terrorism and retributive violence, I argue, is also

applicable to *United 93*. The most spectacular example of this is the way in which the film's American boosterism lends a kind of intertextual credence to President Bush's use of the phrase "Let's Roll!"—the words uttered on *United 93* to signal the beginning of the passenger revolt—as a rallying call for troops sent to fight in Afghanistan.

Simpson's observations are also hauntingly evocative of Walter Benjamin's critique of fascist aesthetics as it manifested in the early history of film. Benjamin warned early on of the ideological framing techniques that tend to obfuscate the embedded ethico-political economies and decontextualizing effects of the cinema. In his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in *Illuminations*, he argues that the "audience's identification with the actor is really an identification with the camera. Consequently, the audience takes the position of the camera" (228). Even the documentation of "factual events" or "evidence," Benjamin says, is completely manipulable and at best always mediated through the editing process. He demonstrates this point with his example of the actor who "happens to be at the studio [...] when he has a shot fired behind him without his being forewarned of it. The frightened reaction can be shot now and be cut into the screen version" (230) at a later date when such a surprised reaction—to what we don't know, except that the context will be completely foreign to the reaction itself—becomes a kind of "authenticating" element that helps to create the film's effect of "reality." The scene thus is not without a degree of "authenticity." However, as a filmic image, the surprised

reaction of the actor is *framed* completely in the absence of its “authentic” context, in what Benjamin calls the empty, a-historical time of the film itself. Arguably, this is *always* the case with film, such that an “event” is archived and thus consigned via a certain perspective, according to a particular camera angle, a given language of transmission, and imprinted and reproduced via any given technological apparatus of “media.” The point, for Benjamin, is that film is often mistakenly taken for the event in- and for-itself—as a kind of metonymic symbol that can irrefutably stand in for the whole. And in regards to the current context of the war on terror—for example, with the New York Times “Portraits of Grief” or *United 93*—David Simpson underlines the multiple connotations of such filmic framing: that it is a literal framing of the images via the camera angle, composition of the shot, as well as what is included or excluded from the frame; however, there is also the connotation of being “framed,” of the photograph or film being treated like a wrongly accused criminal who is duped in order to redirect moral outrage away from what is *really* or *also* going on.

The film, however, is not only a manipulation of the image in production, through its hidden techniques and cinematic “framing” of the event, but also in its non-transferable effect of “a-historicity”—what Benjamin calls empty historical time. In a sense, explains Benjamin, we lose the forest in the detailed close-up of the tree, its limbs, its bark, the very molecules which make up the sap, all of which have already been transported through time and space away from the contextualizing historical frameworks in which they were first made intelligible.

To rethink Benjamin's argument in terms of a hauntological theory of film adaptation, the film can be understood as a kind of specter of the "original" shock registered by the actor. Of course, even that "original" experience is not so much "authentic" as comprehensible in terms of the "already formed 'emotional' language" of what would be considered shocking to the actor at the time. Thus, the filmic "evidence" becomes not so much an "authentic" record of the historical "truth" of this event as one such multiple, heterogeneous specter which *itself* comprises part of the wider "Spirit" of the original—even to the extent of changing the reception and/or intelligible meanings which register in that so-called "original" by "reframing" it in a different light.

Benjamin calls the de-contextualization effect of filmic representation the loss of an image's "aura"—by which he means the image's "historical" or ritualistic value by which it presents itself as existing in and through time. An example of such a palpable aura is the experience of coming into contact with a relic like the preserved body of Lenin—a lifeless corpse on whose "body" is etched its accumulated journey over the historical expanse of Lenin's birth, life and death. Yet, the ritualistic value and/or accumulated historical meaning of such a relic is far in excess of the rotting physical object in- and for-itself. Indeed, the very concept of an "aura" complicates and exceeds the ontologizing gesture of memorialization, as well as the consignment of a Spirit within a particular physical body identifiable as dates of birth and death, managed and contained within a burial plot.

But is it possible that the “true” historical context could have been lost, or that the palpable “auras” of those involved in the United 93 disaster could have been destroyed or nefariously “reframed” when those events are still so recent and raw? Indeed, it is *especially* in such an ungraspable non-context as the disaster that the “true” context (if it ever existed) is disintegrated, history is destroyed, and moral framing is refused. All is consumed in the disaster, says Blanchot. Yet, all these “truth effects” are nonetheless imposed as a knee-jerk reaction against what Hegel calls the “terror of the negative”—the terror of a meaningless death that is beyond normative or moral frameworks of comprehension, and beyond the moral certainty of knowing how to react. *United 93*, I argue, contains a number of examples of ideological framing techniques which have the effect of destroying the “auras”—or singular, ritualistic value that exceeds the ontological coherence of historical “presence”—surrounding the memories of the passengers and the events of that fated flight in the interests of reinscribing those memories from a *particular* ideological, ethical and political perspective: American exceptionalism. This ideological framing is evident in the film’s advertised claim to being rigorously attentive to facts and details,<sup>57</sup> even to the extent of including real participants in the actual events as cast members, such as FAA operations manager Ben Sliney, who in many ways is the “star” of the show. However, these

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<sup>57</sup> The director’s statement on the movie’s official website begins: “United 93 is a film about 9/11. It tells the story of the day through a meticulous reenactment of events surrounding United 93, the last of four hijacked aircraft, in the belief that by examining this single event something much larger can be found—the shape of our world today. [...] Made with the full support of the families of those on board, United 93 will track in real time the dramatic story of what happened inside the

details are fragmented at best, highly mediated, and supplemented in intriguing ways throughout the movie with an underlying propagandistic rhetoric of what constitute “true” American values, virtues, and heroism in the face of impossible odds from a jingoistic, American exceptionalist point of view.

One of the major criticisms leveled against the film concerns its “American” stereotype of German-European passenger Christian Adams. His lines are complete fiction, as there is no viable source. Further, his family refused to participate in the making of the film, unlike many of the other “American” passengers’ families—a fact that inevitably skews the film’s narrative focus and perspective. As Anthony Kaufman writes in his review in *AlterNet*, Adams is depicted as “a German blond businessman who turns out as a stereotypically weak-kneed Euro-pacifist (an obvious non-American who is eventually neutralized)” (n.p.). This review suggests that Adams’ characterization—as a kind of empty signifier made to stand in for European resistance to the war on terror—thus provides an orienting oppositional term against which to frame what are constructed as properly “American” character traits—these, the qualities of being innately active, aggressive, innovative, heroic and self-sacrificing in the face of danger.

*United 93* operates, via a number of competing spectral cinematic and reality effects, to frame and instrumentalize the memories of those involved in order to represent, first, sublimated, universalized American symbols of unity,

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aircraft as well as on the ground” (Joerg Wolf, “German 9/11 Victim Defamed in ‘United 93’

heroism, sacrifice, and family values; second, the terrorists as religious zealots often depicted as divided inwardly regarding their religious values, their mission, and their moral purposiveness; and finally, European cowardice in contrast to American resolve. In the next few pages, I will unpack a few of the specific ways in which these “American values” are constructed via *United 93*’s borrowing from Hollywood, mass media, and documentary film genres such as “the disaster/action genre,” “embedded journalism,” propaganda techniques, and a kind of documentary-style forensic reconstruction of “authentic” evidence.

*Adapting Disaster—United 93 and the Hollywood action/disaster film*

Director of Hollywood action films like *The Bourne Supremacy*, Paul Greengrass clearly draws on the conventions of that genre for *United 93*. These include his choice of music, sense of suspense, stock characters and dialogue. In action/disaster genre films, there must be identifiable “good guys” and “bad guys”—or at least delineable goodness and badness at war within the characters. And in the face of oblivion, the main characters (and vicariously the audience) must have some recourse to moral redemption or meaning that they can take from their trials. The action/disaster genre is even detectible in the way in which *United 93* deploys “real life” transcribed dialogue from the actual event, which is selected specifically to model hyper-Americanized moral traits including “family values,” the triumph of American capitalism over terrorist ideology, and taking

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Movie.” *Atlantic Monthly*, Sept 10, 2006. Accessed online Mar 16, 07).

decisive action in the face of immanent disaster. In these ways, Greengrass instrumentalizes the action/disaster genre as an ethico-ideological training technique for evoking certain calculated responses from the audience, within and through the framework of a recognizably “realistic” (Hollywood) version of this disastrous event.

In his glowing review of *United 93*, Roger Ebert contrasts the film explicitly in relation to other Hollywood disaster/action genre films, noting that

in most movies about doomed voyages, we meet a few key characters we'll be following: The newlyweds, the granny, the businessman, the man with a secret. Here there's none of that. [...] The movie contains no politics. No theory. No personal chit-chat. No patriotic speeches. We never see the big picture. (Ebert, n.p.)

Ebert is correct to critique the film as an example of a Hollywood action/disaster movie. However, he is wrong here on every point. For example, all of the terrorists are clearly “men with secrets.” Further, there are obvious stock characterizations peopling the film: among others, there is the elderly couple, the granny, the young student traveling abroad, the athletic young men who inevitably become “foot soldiers,” and the cool-headed businessman. Indeed, one “real life” passenger central to the action explicitly describes himself—in the brief and highly selected idle chit-chat allotted all the main characters—as a businessman on a business trip, nothing more. And his “business-like” attitude and skill-sets—a clear embedded reference to American capitalist know-how and innovation—is depicted as the decisive factor spurring him on to take action,



organize the others and instigate the revolt. But is there a kernel of truth to such a characterization?

The passenger was a businessman, and it seems likely that he did have a hand in instigating the revolt. It also seems clear he is a hero. But a hero for whom and in whose interests? The “evidence” is highly fragmentary, mediated, and much of the dialogue in the film version is fiction. Given the ways in which the film selects, frames and fictionalizes “the businessman’s” actions, we can’t be sure there is anything left of his singular “life” in this filmic adaptation of the disaster in which he perished. Indeed, the way in which the film frames this passenger’s actions—through the highly-selected “idle chit-chat” that sets up the action of the film, as well as the filming techniques and shot selection itself—depicts these actions above all as those of an idealized “American businessman” *par excellence*. This encourages a stereotypical rendering of his *singular* acts of heroism, and sublimates them in the service of a universalized celebration of the way in which “American capitalism” served as a model on United Airlines flight 93 to triumph over terror.

The brevity and selection of all the character’s “idle chit-chat” is a key element in the film’s ethical framing of events. It serves to supplement the action—in a highly simplified way, akin to most Hollywood action/disaster genre films—by raising certain “everyday” concerns supposedly common to all the “good” characters just before the events of 9/11 unfold. These include a universalized concern for family (specifically “babies”) and for taking more time

away from the tedium of everyday life to vacation and enjoy the “good things.” Likewise, the brief dialogue afforded the “bad” terrorists is highly selected and simplified to amplify “extremist” religious beliefs (particularly the cutting of body hair and hotel-room prayers before “jihad”), violence, and inner moral turmoil. This dialogue, for example, constructs a sub-plot which encourages speculation that the terrorists might have been inwardly divided about their actions, beliefs, as well as in their loyalties to each other. This subplot clearly works as an orienting oppositional device against which to contrast “American” cooperation, family values, and moral and religious virtue. At one point in the action on the plane, there is an extended sequence in which several passengers—Americans as well as terrorists—are all seen praying aloud. The terrorists, however, are depicted as praying for victory next to dead bodies and blood-smeared walls, further demonizing their religious beliefs by normativizing the context of those prayers as “properly framed” within scenes of blood, gore, and terrorist violence. Furthermore, most of the terrorists’ “chit chat” is fiction, drawn from pure speculation after the fact and without first-hand recorded evidence. For these reasons, such “idle chatter” hardly does justice to the irreducible singularities or complexities of these character’s lives just before they were cut short in the norm-destroying event of the disaster.

Yet the Hollywood action/disaster genre after which Greengrass’ film is modeled *relies* upon such simplified, normative moral binaries for focusing and intensifying its dramatic “reality effects.” What’s more, the binaristic “good guy

vs. bad guy” framing of the story serves as a model for militaristic duty and the moral “rightness” of retributive violence. The deeper significance of *United 93*’s adaptation of the Hollywood disaster film, however, lies in the ways in which this genre functions as a kind of normativizing, cultural narrativization of what constitutes the “ultimate evil” and “the worst” that such evil can visit on “us.” The disaster—as constituted in the Hollywood film—therefore, both draws upon and works to normativize (on a globalized scale) particular binaristic notions of good vs. evil, the worst vs. the best, the norm vs. the disaster.

This “Hollywood” notion of the disaster, however, is in stark contrast to Maurice Blanchot’s conceptualization of the term in his book *The Writing of the Disaster* (1995). Blanchot’s thinking of the disaster is much more rooted in the Holocaust, yet radicalizes the term beyond its ability to be contained or reduced to any particular historical, etymological, or moral “origins.” Indeed, Blanchot exhausts the term, and in doing so throws into question the very idea of finding the “moral” that will somehow redeem the disaster from destroying even itself as an ethical concept. For Blanchot, the disaster constitutes a kind of unwriting of ethics, as well as a refusal of moral decisiveness in the face of the disaster’s unthinkability. Blanchot describes the disaster as “an excess of experience” (51) which disallows experience as such. In his words,

we feel that there cannot be any experience of the disaster, even if we were to understand disaster to be the ultimate experience. This is one of its features: it impoverishes all experience, withdraws from experience all authenticity; [...] [it] consumes all that is present till presence is precisely what is exempt from the present. (51)

Here, Blanchot echoes a number of accounts of how the World Trade Center attacks seemed almost *in-authentic* given the normative frames of reference (such as mass media) according to which North Americans judge “authentic” effects of “reality.” Experience is one such framework, or “reality effect,” which Blanchot sees utterly destroyed in the disaster. This is because in the disaster, laws of normality no longer apply and experience has no basis on which to orient itself in relation to that which is outside of experience. Such an experience of the disaster as that depicted in *United 93*, for Blanchot, is in “reality” not “realistic”—meaning comprehensible. The disaster is more accurately a sudden, unforeseeable interruption which is irreducible to and completely in excess of “reality” as such. It is a disastrous interruption of radical alterity to the “norm,” to the extent that it consumes all our frames of reference and even our “life” as we are capable of knowing it. The illusory effect of “presence,” says Blanchot, is excluded from itself in this sudden destruction of its architectonic conditions of possibility. In short, there is no language to describe the indescribable disaster, and thus it can never be “present.” This is because such an effect of presence requires language to “present” itself as such, but the disaster leaves us “speechless.”

As opposed to the American boosterism of *United 93* which resembles an almost metonymic unfolding of the war on terror in Reader’s Digest form, Blanchot sees the disaster as evoking not action, but “passivity, the contrary of activity” (15). This is because, for him, the disaster restricts our fields of

perception (Blanchot 15) and “makes us mute as far as the word we owe [the other] is concerned” (27). Blanchot’s concept of “passivity,” however, is not the binary opposite of activity. Instead, it implies the *absence of a frame of reference, knowledge, or language on which to base activity*. In Blanchot’s words, “the infiniteness of our destruction [...] is the measure of our passivity” (30). Thus, Blanchot calls the “disaster that which does not have the ultimate for a limit: it bears the ultimate away in the disaster” (28). The “ultimate,” or the “worst,” can never be planned for, conceptualized, or adequately reacted to, since the very concept destroys itself when it arrives, and is thus always to come. This is in part due to the way in which the disaster, for Blanchot, is “fragmentary” and “though unique, repeats, and is undone by repetition. [...] Repetition: the ultimate over and over, general collapse, destruction of the present” (42). The worst, the ultimate—the disaster—is only ever supplementally representable, according to Blanchot, through the irreducible, irreparable fragments of language and of its very context which are left in its wake. The disaster destroys any frame of reference on which to judge the disaster as “the worst,” and thus a representation of the disaster can only ever result in a spectral rehashing of that which is beyond description and in fact destroys itself. The “passivity” Blanchot attaches to the disaster’s referentless, infinite “lacunary silence”—a kind of writing which unwrites itself—is thus hardly the opposite of “active,” but instead implies a rigorous and unrelenting “responsibility” to “think endlessly, the way one dies—

this is the thinking that patience in its innocent perseverance seems to impose”  
(39).

The Hollywood disaster/action *genre* usually encourages the imposition of a clear moral message through which the “event” can be understood and which is reconstructed from the wreckage of the disaster. This is the “moral” of the story to which is attached a particular “proper” ethical response. Blanchot, on the other hand, demonstrates how such a moral truth is precisely what is *denied* in the melee of meaning destruction of the disaster, particularly as it is represented in the Hollywood “disaster genre.” While Blanchot himself tends to fetishize the concept of writing as an *idealized* transmitter of the non-truth of disaster, he nonetheless productively demonstrates that there is *nothing* generic to the disaster. It is not that we are unable to act or to mourn in the face of disaster, but that the meaning and ethical import of these actions are always *open and in question*, and thus never *ultimately* decidable. As a disaster/action film, therefore, *United 93* is haunted by an irresolvable aporia: the disaster movie as the ultimate triumph of heroism and its moral law in the face of disaster vs. Blanchot’s understanding of the disaster as the ultimate destruction of absolute ethical meaning *par excellence*.

### *Documenting Terror*

*United 93*, however, is much more than a Hollywood action/disaster movie. It can also be understood to draw upon elements from documentary film—in particular for “convincing” stylistic elements, but also in its adaptation

of “hard news” sources. Indeed, the entire premise of the film, as the director’s statement on the film’s website implies, is that it serves in part as a *documentation* or meticulous reenactment of “real events.” The look of the film arguably reflects this, with its relatively unknown actors, shaky camera technique, and “cinema verite” sounding dialogue. *United 93* arguably embeds these “reality effects” of documentary film within its overall cinematic framework without being entirely self-reflexive or transparent about *the ways* in which documentary “evidence” and techniques are manipulated through editing, ideological framing and the aesthetic effects of genre.

Further encouraging the film’s reception as a type of documentary is the inclusion on its DVD release of an actual hour-long “making of” documentary. This documentary is built around interviews with the families of some of the crash victims who in many cases also participated in the making of *United 93*. The families are filmed meeting the actors who play their lost relatives. These emotionally charged meetings often resemble uncanny visitations by spirits of those dead relatives themselves. It’s as if Greengrass is encouraging an interpretation of his film as a kind of spectral event whereby the spirits of the victims of United Airlines Flight 93 are somehow channeled through Hollywood actors in order to deliver last messages and/or “closure” to their families, as well as to an American public who have been “nationally” traumatized by the disaster. As Joe Nacky (a family member of one of the crash victims) comments in Greengrass’ documentary: “they’re everybody’s family now.” Thus, as

Baudrillard predicted, in *United 93* “reality” is figured as existing through the cinematic and the cinematic as becoming a form of “reality itself.”

### *Conclusion*

Particularly in the ways in which it frames itself as an adaptation of the “truth” about the events of 9/11, *United 93* resembles a kind of “presencing” of a particular moral and indeed *religious* “reality effect.” Even the film’s poster contains markedly religious qualities. The plane, for example, is depicted as flying not straight down but *up* into the heavens. Rays of ethereal sunlight beam down through the clouds encircling the aircraft, evoking a classically-stylized scene of divine deliverance to heaven for those doomed passengers whose souls have arrived safely at their final destinations, even if their plane did not. As a purportedly “faithful”—if impossibly fragmented and mediated—adaptation of original sources, the film resembles a kind of supplemental evocation of the event itself. It does this even to the point of *standing in for* the event itself. This is achieved most strikingly through the inclusion of actual participants in key roles, such as Ben Sliney’s depiction of himself as the FAA operations head, but also by the film’s reenactment of actual dialogue taken from phone calls between passengers of United 93 and their families during the doomed flight.

And yet, there are strategic holes in the evidence that are filled in by the filmmakers in intriguing ways, lending the characterizations of “real people” an almost stereotypically American exceptionalist aura. These “real people,” as



framed by the film, thus become iconic heroes and villains, all helping to depict *properly American* responses to terror. Viewed through a hauntological lens, *United 93* also serves as an occasion for considering how our media experiences of 9/11 have become part of that very event itself. To paraphrase one grieving parent featured in the DVD version's documentary supplement: he wanted to come to the "families-only" advanced screening in order to finally find out what "*actually happened*" to his daughter. Little time or effort is spent in the film, however, on making transparent the limits and contingencies of digital communications media, the reliability of second-hand accounts of conversations engaged in under such stressful conditions, or the fact that no one is left alive to corroborate any of this so-called evidence which Greengrass presents as the equivalent of a direct transmission of "truth."

To be sure, *United 93*'s recounting of the disaster is reductive, manipulative, and propagandistic. To borrow David Simpson's words, this adaptation of those events "not only dishonours the dead in profound ways but also endangers the living across much of the world. The dead, in other words, have been framed to the purpose of justifying more deaths" (88). What's more, Greengrass' film shows all the American passengers to be essentially happy and getting happier until "terror" strikes them down. From the point of view of the relatives, this is an understandable—perhaps even necessary—impulse: to remember one's loved ones in the best light and in happier times. However, when those idealizations of the dead become instrumentalized to the purpose of

justifying unspeakable violence and state terrorism on a global scale, such a work of mourning does no justice at all.

## Conclusion

### Post-9/11 Ethics and the Possible Future(s) of Forgiveness

What does it mean—what *could* it mean—to *forgive* those responsible for 9/11?

A loaded question, to be sure, and in many ways an impossible one. For, as Jacques Derrida suggests in “Hostipitality,”

if forgiveness is possible, if there is forgiveness, it must forgive the unforgivable—such is the logical aporia. [...] The forgiveness of the forgivable does not forgive anything: it is not forgiveness. In order to forgive, one must [*il faut*] therefore forgive the unforgivable, but the unforgivable that remains [*demeuré*] unforgivable, the worst of the worst: the unforgivable that resists any process of transformation of me or of the other, that resists any alteration, any historical reconciliation that would change the conditions or the circumstances of the judgment. (385)

“Forgiveness,” here, implies a kind of law of the forgivable. The “unforgivable,” on the other hand, implies a kind of radical, inaccessible (indeed transcendental) other to the forgivable—the “worst of the worst;” that which could possibly resist transformation itself or of me; that which could possibly be immune to alteration in relation to shifting historical circumstances of the judgment against it. In short, the unforgivable is unimaginably, impossibly and “purely” evil. Yet to forgive, says Derrida, can only be achieved if one is forgiving the *unforgivable*—or that which is beyond the conceptual limits of “forgiveness” as such and, at the same time, also secretly grounds the moral economy of forgiveness. The unforgivable is thus both inside and outside the economy of the forgivable all at once—it is

both us *and* them; good *and* evil. The forgivable, says Derrida, has already been forgiven in advance and is thus not really forgiveness of anything. But how can one possibly forgive the unforgivable, particularly in the names of those who are no longer living and thus not able to speak for themselves in the same way? Moreover, to “forgive” those “responsible” (for whatever might possibly be meant, or *could* be meant, by 9/11) implies an identifiable culprit who can be named, ontologized and hailed as *the* identifiable *other in need of forgiveness*. But is such a singular perpetrator or group of perpetrators so easily identifiable as those properly in possession of sole “responsibility” for the irreducibly complex constellations of causes, effects, meanings and memories associated with 9/11? Arguably, such an economy of blame would only short change the more productive mourning work of understanding how we are all implicated in those “events,” and how the impossible possibility of “forgiving” those responsible involves *asking* for forgiveness as much as offering it.

Forgiveness is a key concept in Christian theology—a theology structured as a kind of economy of redemption—and haunts the post-9/11 evangelical ethical rhetoric of the Bush administration. But what particular specter(s) of Christian forgiveness are signified in Bush’s rhetoric? The Christian gesture of “turning the other cheek” haunts Bush’s rhetoric, but arguably as the *fundamental* spectral remainder of Christian redemption that must be refused and repressed in order to justify the retributive violence of the war on terror, modeled as a kind of crusade or divine wrath after the old testament in answer to what Bush once called the

“day of fire.” Could “forgiveness”—a Specter haunting Bush’s own theological belief system as the forgotten *central concern* of that redemptive Christian philosophy—be thus already at work in the Bush rhetoric as an auto-deconstructive remainder evoked as an obvious alternative to the disastrous course the war on terror has taken thus far?

What could possibly be meant or opened up by recuperating Christian forgiveness from the cinders of post-9/11 global *in*-hospitality and cultural *mis*-understanding left in the wake of the war on terror? What could it mean to forgive the unforgivable as a kind of antidote to the seemingly impossible ethical impasse now invoked by the normative moral symbolism now associated with 9/11? A *certain* understanding of Christian forgiveness is to “turn the other cheek.” One possible reading of this turning of the cheek implies the simultaneous turning of one’s head—perhaps to gain another perspectival view of the other’s face, or perhaps even to *avoid* another blow by changing the position of one’s own face in order to reassess, recoup, and perhaps even regroup for the purposes of a better defensive position. Yet another possibility is that one turns one’s cheek in order to show the other *another side* of my face—perhaps a friendlier, more understanding side—which is perhaps less threatening, more diplomatic, and less worthy of the first blow. In fact, a radically different interpretation of the other’s blow to my cheek is perhaps that it is meant to *forcibly* turn my cheek so that I *must* assume a different perspectival stance in relation to the other. Could it be possible that the blow—while cruel and

unforgivable—was the only means left to the other to gain recognition from me who was, up until the blow, unwilling or unable to see, let alone “recognize” them?

If one reads the terrorist act as a kind of unforgivable blow from the other seeking to forcibly turn my other cheek, the stakes of forgiveness change. Forgiveness might then constitute an act of hospitality to a radical other who is otherwise beyond my own myopic horizon of hospitality and beyond the scope of my own law of allowable forgiveness, yet in a certain way *grounds* that very secret moral economy of forgivability. Indeed, the blow was *invited* by the stubborn, self-righteous positioning of my cheek in a stance turned away from the other. The terrorizing blow to my cheek registers as a shock, or as a kind of assault on my own moral conceptual apparatus designed to buffer such shocks. This type of perceived terrorization of my inner moral sanctum by the evil other is akin to Hegel’s concept of terror, which implies a terrifying breach in my own moral sense-certainty by an other who is—in truth—*a part of myself*. David Simpson makes a similar point in *9/11: The Culture of Memorialization*, pointing out that

not only are the events of Abu Ghraib the events of American prisons, but bin Laden wealth is/was deeply implicated in the U.S. economy, Osama himself was a former ally in the war against the USSR in Afghanistan, Saddam himself was an ally whom America supported in his war against Iran (and who in 1988 gassed some of his own citizens, the Kurds—one of the crimes produced against him in 2003—with weapons financed by American support). Every imagining of the other is an encounter with the self: *they are us*. (135-6)

For Hegel, this other/self is terrifying because the self is unable to gain mastery over it, and therefore it must be destroyed. Clearly this is the intended outcome of the War on Terror. But at the same time, the very condition of possibility for “mastery” is a holding in place—or in “bondage”—that orients an oppositional abyss of the “beyond” which resides outside (yet also within) the finitudinal limits of my sense-certain being. This beyond is the radical other—in this case, the terrorist—who is constituted *within and through* my own recognition of them. And as Hegel also stipulated, if we are to save *ourselves* before the life-and-death battle with the other consumes us both, we must *forgive* them by recognizing our mutual dependence on each other.

But this means that I will also have to extend forgiveness *beyond* what I am capable of forgiving in advance—according to my own law of forgiveness—by fore-giving forgiveness to the radical, unforeseeable (or terrifying possibility of the) other. This is why Emmanuel Levinas, in *Otherwise Than Being*, likens a certain ethical openness to the other as a kind of submission of myself to the radical other as a *hostage* at their mercy. Such an offering myself up as a hostage of the “terrorist other” is clearly not an option for the Bush administration. Yet, what are the consequences of *not* submitting myself (to myself) in order to save myself/ourselves through such a radical act of forgiveness and unconditional trust?

To be sure, an impossible, even paleonymic example of the Bush administration’s capacity for forgiveness is its treatment of its once good “friend,”

Saddam Hussein. The execution of Saddam Hussein by hanging on December 30, 2006, represents a trauma, not only for Hussein's family, but also for the Iraqi nation, for the families and friends of those Hussein himself tortured and killed over the years as a member of the Iraq military and later as a ruthless, genocidal dictator, and for the global community who somehow were given access to a film of the hanging of Saddam via a cellphone video which became the most downloaded video on YouTube, the popular internet video-sharing website. Who could possibly be authorized to "forgive" Saddam Hussein for all his crimes? And yet, far from a symbolic triumph for "Iraqi justice"—as the trial and execution were hailed by the Bush administration—the way in which Saddam's demise unfolded created an even more devastating trauma in the form of an attack on the legitimacy of international law which has been left in a shambles as a result of the post-9/11 context of "global emergency" and "total war." Indeed, to "forgive" Saddam for his supposed part in 9/11 would, in the end, have been to forgive *nothing at all* as he had nothing to do with it. However, the Bush doctrine of prevention—which somehow justifies the devastating, decisive punishment before the "crime" has even been committed or the supposed perpetrators proven "guilty"—necessitates urgent debate over the "forgiveness" of the *unforgivable to come*. Such a debate arguably must take place if there is to be a hope of something like "justice" in such matters of global importance for the future(s) of humanity and its peaceful co-habitation as Saddam's legally sanctioned assassination and the concomitant destruction of his country.



Without a doubt, it is the U.S. and its highly calculated, deceptively selective interventions into Iraqi sovereignty, governmentality, law, and the functioning of its national institutions that are most responsible for Saddam's death at the hands of what amounted to a government sanctioned mob rife for revenge. Even the scandalous leaking of the cell-phone video of Saddam's execution via YouTube is rumored be attributable to U.S. intervention, or at least a strategic *lack* of intervention by the U.S.—currently the de facto force-of-law behind Iraqi governmentality—which ensured that Saddam's legal rights to secrecy and sanctity surrounding his execution would be breached. In fact, as the very arbiter of “law and order” in Iraq since its invasion of that country, the Bush administration must be understood as ultimately responsible for every aspect of the legal circus surrounding Saddam's trial and the ways in which it resembled—more than anything else—an excuse for exacting revenge and launching an ethnic cleansing campaign that has claimed thousands of Iraqi lives in the year following Saddam's execution. This genocide continues in spite of a now dwindling Sunni population in once mixed-race neighborhoods of Iraq. The travesty of justice and continuing ethnic-based human tragedy surrounding Saddam's “trial” and execution underscore the contradiction at the heart of the “war on terror:” the way in which it has turned into—in many ways has always been—a war *of* terror. To be sure, the war on terror has become a form of globalized McCarthyism armed with nuclear weapons.

Is the “justice” handed Saddam Hussein to be the model of hospitality, reconciliation and forgiveness that the war on terror intends to extend in its remaking of the world into the “proper” habitus of “democratic values” and “freedom?” Saddam’s trial and execution—brought about at the cost of thousands of innocent lives in a completely unjustified war that has destroyed that country—could have been an occasion for demonstrating restraint, for working towards reconciliation, and for offering forgiveness for the unforgivable (and, as it turns out, for “crimes” that never existed) in the interests of opening up the possibility of a greater good to come from such disastrous circumstances. Instead, the trial became a model for the ways in which the Bush administration’s “hospitality” towards the rest of the world is—on closer examination—akin to a violent hostage taking of the globe and a vengeful en/forcement of “freedom” and “democracy” on all its inhabitants. Thus, another key Christian edict is ignored here by the Bush administration—“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”—as even the U.S. government itself refuses to negotiate with hostage-takers. Saddam Hussein, once a close friend, now serves as an example of how the U.S. government treats those who have fallen from its favour. Oh, with friends like the U.S., what is left for the very concept of “enemy” to signify?

In conclusion, I want to suggest that the very possible future(s) to come of “peace”—whatever such a thing might mean or could mean—hinges on the impossible possibility of forgiving the “terrorist other” who is, in truth, both other and identical to “us.” This may be one possible meaning hidden within Bush’s

threatening phrase: “You are either for us or against us.” In fact—as far as the post-9/11 concept of terrorist can be understood at all—the “terrorist” is *both* for and against us, because *they* are *us*. To hunt down and kill the terrorist other until they—or “we”—are finally eradicated is thus to hunt down and kill ourselves, the global community of fellow humans—slowly, violently and without the possibility of redemption. I would therefore pose this question to President Bush: Is this the Christian thing to do?

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