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## The Progeny of Prometheus: Solidarity as Gift

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# The *Word* Hoard

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## The Progeny of Prometheus: Solidarity as Gift by Eileen Wennekers

### *I: Progeny, Similitude, Ambivalence*

In their discussion of Daniel Allan Cox's recent novel, *Krakow Melt*, Matthew Halse and Dock Currie frame an invitation that I find impossible to refuse:

Could the progeny of Prometheus not also be said to be queer? Could the dissent and resistances of queer communities not be said to be Promethean? Having stolen fire from the gods, the gift that Prometheus confers to humanity is indeed not technical, it is that which is unsanctioned, not authorized, different, and makes of us those who, in our very being, lie outside the count and scope of systematic and theological orders imposed from above? (Halse and Currie, 5)

The Oxford English Dictionary defines *progeny* in terms of heterosexual reproduction (*OED* "Progeny"). The origin of this sense is located in the Latin *progenies*, meaning lineage. As the recitation of begets that characterizes the history of several "systematic and theological orders imposed from above," the articulation of progeny becomes the history of the Law of the Father. Yet in no version of the myth does Prometheus beget children, human or otherwise. Accordingly, another vernacular potential demands attention: "A result of a creative effort, a project" (*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*). If, then, Prometheus's theft is the creative act that inaugurates the technical capacities

of humans, it is the progeny of this act that Halse and Currie direct me towards—the gift of *technê* which renders humans somehow excessively human. It is this gift which might also be said to be queer.

This valence of *progeny* can be diagrammed through an investigation of its etymological origins. The term is derived from Latin, a language in which the prefix *pro* generally indicates "in front of, before"; the noun, *genus*, "origin." The act of compounding the two might serve to intensify their shared resonance—before origin, the beginning, the source—an operation whose effects are quite compatible with the *OED* definition I've cited. Or, this redundancy might appear as the trace of the repression of the other possible senses of *pro*, which can also mean "in return for" or "instead of". Giving *pro* this aspect raises the possibility that the "result of creative effort" is something that stands "instead of" or "in return for" its *genus*. Progeny, then, is that which stands in return for its origin. As such, it indicates a system of exchange, one characterized by a singular kind of reciprocity that must be considered within the economy (if that word can even be used) of the gift. Prometheus's gift might signify its substance—fire, writing, prophecy, *technê*—or, it might refer to the gift itself, with its structures of reciprocity.

In his formulation of the gift-relationship, Marcel Mauss argues that the gift, in all of its forms, is first and foremost characterized by reciprocal obligation, and thus makes visible both a fundamental

antagonism and a fundamental social bond: “To present them constitutes a request, to accept them is to commit themselves” (31). Especially in the phenomenon of potlatch, gifts are given “so as to transform into persons having an obligation those who have placed you yourself under a similar obligation... Everything is based upon the principles of antagonism and rivalry” (37). This necessity “explains the double meaning of the word *gift* in all these languages—on the one hand, a gift, on the other, poison” (63). Thus the gift is of itself ambivalent, both a good and a poison, but further, Jacques Derrida argues, it is also a manifestation of the principle of alterity in the register of symbolic time:

It demands time, the thing, but it demands a delimited time, neither an instant nor an infinite time, but a time determined by a term, in other words, a rhythm, a cadence. The thing is not *in* time, it is or it has time, or rather it demands to have, to give, or to take time, and time as rhythm, a rhythm that does not befall a homogeneity, but that structures it originally. (*Given Time* 41)

The gift, Derrida observes, is in and of itself “the marking of a trace” (*GT* 43): it stands instead of its origin, a fetish of the syntax which links together giver and recipient under a mutual obligation. Both this ambivalent obligation and the temporal alterity that characterize the gap between receiving and returning are made visible by the gift, and both are made visible by the form taken by the Promethean gift of fire. Sharing these qualities, fire and the gift are governed within alchemical epistemology by the principle of analogy, linked in similitude by a “subtle resemblance of relations” (Foucault, *OT* 21).

In his essay on “The Prose of the World,” Michel

Foucault describes four facets of similitude, which together, he argues, encompass the early modern model of causality. *Convenientia* functions by means of the adjacency of one thing to another: “In this way, movement, influences, passions, and properties too are communicated, so that in this hinge between two things a resemblance appears... Resemblances impose adjacencies that in their turn guarantee further resemblances” (*OT* 18). The principle of *aemulatio* is a form of convenience that is “freed from the law of place and is able to function, without motion, from a distance”—“the links of emulation, unlike the elements of *convenientia*, do not form a chain but rather a series of concentric circles reflecting and rivalling each other” (*OT* 19, 21). These two principles are superimposed in the operation of analogy through the similitudes of relations: “It makes possible the marvellous confrontation of resemblances across space,” but also requires the operation of “adjacencies, of bonds and joints” (21). By virtue of this superimposition, the force of analogy makes possible the visible manifestation of invisible similitudes: “Its power is immense, for the similitudes of which it treats are not the visible, substantial ones between things themselves; they need only be the more subtle resemblances of relations” (21). All of these principles, finally, are both “resumed and explained” in the phenomenon of sympathy, which, necessitating as it must its “twin, antipathy” (24) is, by this necessity, of itself ambivalent:

Sympathy is an instance of the same so strong that it will not rest content to be merely one of the forms of likeness; it has the dangerous power of *assimilating*, of rendering things identical to one another, of mingling, of causing their individuality to disappear—and thus of rendering them foreign to what they were

before. Sympathy transforms, it *alters*, but in the direction of identity, so that if its power were not counterbalanced it would reduce the world...the featureless form of the same.

This is why sympathy is compensated for by its twin, antipathy. Antipathy maintains the isolation of things and prevents their assimilation; it encloses every species within its impenetrable difference and its propensity to continue being what it is. (emphasis added, *OT* 23-24)

Described as a principle both harmonizing and dangerous, sympathy, in its effective as well as original ambivalence, resembles Mauss's conceptualization of the gift. The significance of the transformative power of sympathy cannot be overstated (and it will be taken up below), and neither can Foucault's observation of the tendency of sympathy to alter in the direction of identity. This possibility is a fundamental problem faced in the organization of communities of dissent, where theoretical attempts to subsume all participants under one conceptualization of the structural determinants of oppression has often poisoned relationships between, for example, feminist and queer activist organizations. Thus the notion that Foucault advances—that sympathy requires the dialectical opposition of antipathy in order to function in and of itself as a principle of similitude, rather than of the same—directs us towards a recognition that is absolutely vital for activists who wish to build solidarity across communities: that our relationships not only will be, but must be, characterized by ambivalence, but that this ambivalence can be that of the gift.

I am using the word ambivalence purposefully, because I want to introduce this concept alongside that of alterity. Although the term valence is com-

monly understood to describe the tendency of electrical and chemical bonds formed between atoms (and it may be of interest to note here that electricity often acts through the means of alternating current), its particular root is the verb “*valere*,” to be strong. The prefix “*ambi*,” meaning both, then modifies “*valent*” to mean strong in two ways at the same time, but it is, I think, critical to note that its first usage (within modernist psychology—the neologism first appears in 1912) indicated that that which is ambivalent is that which is simultaneously attractive and repulsive.<sup>1</sup> Curiously enough, however, the simultaneity of sympathy and antipathy is the governing principle of a much earlier system of knowledge.

The ambivalent nature of the gift is again expressed in Plato's *Phaedrus*. Referring, obliquely, to *Prometheus Bound*, Socrates recounts the myth in which the god Theuth offers King Thamus writing as a remedy for memory. Thamus refuses, arguing that such a technology will in fact take the place of, be “instead of,” or “in return for” memory. This logic is reinforced when Socrates explicitly refers to the written text *Phaedrus* consults on the subject of *eros* as a *pharmakon*. His characterization of writing as ambivalent leads Derrida to remark:

This *pharmakon*, this ‘medicine,’ this philtre, which acts as both remedy and poison, already introduces itself into the body of discourse with all its ambivalence. This charm, this spell-binding virtue, this power of fascination, can be—alternately or simultaneously—beneficent or maleficent. (*Dissemination* 70)

The play of sympathy and antipathy which Foucault invokes as the logic of alchemy is clearly echoed in Derrida's characterization of writing as a *pharmakon*. This structuring ambivalence also cha-

racterizes the discourse on *eros* which Socrates and Phaedrus are more explicitly engaged in. Alongside writing, *eros* is framed quite explicitly by Socrates as a gift—that of divine madness:

I told a lie when I said that the beloved ought to accept the non-lover because the one is sane, and the other mad. It might be so if madness were simply an evil, but there is also a madness which is a divine gift, and the source of the chiefest blessings granted to man. For prophecy is a madness.

The thread of similitude, whose mark is ambivalence, runs through *eros*, fire, alchemy, alterity, ambivalence, and writing. All are structured by the poetics of the gift. All make manifest a transformation. It is this transformative force that is the progeny of Prometheus's rebellion, a gift which we are obliged to reciprocate.

## *II: The Gift of Prometheus*

The gift of Prometheus is twofold. His first, to Zeus, is deceptive; his second, to man, is the product of deception. In Hesiod's *Theogony*, Prometheus gives Zeus the first choice of two offerings, one for humans, and one for the gods. Though aware of the deception, out of a desire to have cause to do evil to mortal men Zeus accepts the ruse:

For he set for them the flesh and the inmeats with rich fat upon a hide, and covered them with an ox paunch; but for Zeus he set the white bones, craftily arraying them, and covering them with glistening fat. Then the Father of gods and men spake unto him: 'Son of Iapetos, most notable of all princes, how unfairly, O fond! hast thou divided the portions!'

So spake Zeus, who knoweth counsels imperishable, and mocked him. Then spake to him in turn Prometheus of crooked counsels, smiling quietly, but forgetting not his crafty guile: "Zeus, most glorious, mightiest of the everlasting gods, of these portions choose which-ever thy soul within thy breast biddeth thee."

So spake he with crafty intent. But Zeus, who knoweth counsels imperishable, knew and failed not to remark the guile; and in his heart he boded evil things for mortal men, which were destined to be fulfilled. (50-51)

Zeus, upon confirming the deception, revenges himself by depriving man of fire:

And thenceforward, remembering ever more that guile, he gave not the might of blazing fire to wretched mortals who dwell upon the earth. But the good son of Iapetos deceived him and stole the far-seen gleam of unwearied fire in a hollow fennel stalk, and stung to the depths of the heart of Zeus who thundereth on high, and angered his dear heart when he beheld among men the far-shining gleam of fire. And straight-away for fire he devised evil for men. (51)

Although the incitation of Zeus's malevolence is explicitly the consequence of Prometheus's gift, this does not relieve Zeus of his obligation. He must return ruse for ruse, and thus doubles Prometheus's gift with one of his own: that of woman, who is, Hesiod writes, "the bane of men" and "conversant with the deeds of evil," for it is by woman that the possibility of an evil family, the curse of lineage, is made possible (53). The progeny of Zeus's gift, lineage itself, that which guarantees the Law of the Father, is conceived of as an evil, a curse—or, rather, mirroring

the ambivalent nature of the gift of fire, as both a good and as a source of grief.

I should note here that I am referring, with all due courtesy, to Halse and Currie's quite legitimate problematization of the terms upon which solidarity between feminist and queer communities might be grounded (Halse and Currie, 8). Their discussion references Hesiod's *Works and Days*, which revises his initial version of the myth of Prometheus substantially to introduce the figure of Pandora, who is herself a gift and who bears yet another gift: the jar which contains all evils that plague men (2). However, the symbolic identity of Pandora and the poisoned gift is one which has, historically, acted as the fulcrum of a system that justifies patriarchal aggression against women in the cultures in which it obtains. By invoking Mauss's notion of the gift in order to indicate the structural correspondence between Prometheus's and Zeus's gifts, I wish, very fervently, to muddy the waters in which it is possible to collapse a community of dissent—that of feminism—with the mythological (and patriarchal mythological) representation of Pandora. In conversation with Halse and Currie, in debt to their introduction of the question of Promethean progeny, and in the spirit of reciprocity, I would like to draw a preliminary sketch of a model of solidarity as Promethean gift.

In Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*, the gift of fire becomes the origin of the other gifts of *technê* which Prometheus also bequeaths to humans. Relating how he “made to lodge within” humans “blind hopes” that will stop them from “brooding on death” (248–50), Prometheus continues, “I also bestowed fire upon them” (252):

Chorus: “So short-lived creatures now have blazing fire?”

Prometheus: “Yes, and from it will learn many skills.” (253–54)

Among these skills, “the combining of letters” is described: “memory's helper, hardworking mother of the arts” (460-1). Fire, then, is linked to writing, and writing to all other arts in the network of similitudes that Foucault refers to when he observes of alchemical epistemology that “the world of similarities can only be a world of signs” (*OT* 26).<sup>2</sup> Radek, in his final letter to Dorota, engages with this system of correspondences by short-circuiting through the medium of writing to propose fire itself as the medicine for memory:

Killing cells, turning into a piece of smoke, coughing, choking, absorbing the physical world one element at a time, blinding tears that taste like wood, making memories, building sediment cakes inside you, making memories, can't exhale because more smoke will come in, flavouring your hair, making memories, staining you the colour of all things, raking heat through your chest, feels like gravel and baked blood, killing tissue, this horrible synthesis of elements, forcing you to grow as a person, to change. (Cox 143–44)

Even as it destroys the body, fire deposits the sediment of memories within it. Such a poisonous gift must be ambivalent. Yet, as such, and precisely *as such*, it is the very stuff of alchemy—the transmutation, “this horrible synthesis of elements, forcing...change” (Cox 144). The alchemical fire, operating on the basis of a causality whose motor is similitude, nonetheless realizes its divine potential in the phenomenon of transmutation. Thus, Radek's choice of the word “element” in this letter, this gift to Dorota (poisoned, since it articulates a posthumous plea that

leads to Dorotás death by fire), must be understood in reference to the ancient system of elements that underwrites the medicine of Galen and Hippocrates, and the entire Classical western cosmology.

Within this cosmology, alterity is an establishing characteristic of the very possibility of change, and thus, of transmutation:

That which is one is un-affected is quickly proved; for the one element has nothing into which it will be transformed or by which it will be affected in being transformed, it will be changed into something else, and in being affected it will be affected by some other thing (Galen 69).

In the text of “Alchemy, Art of Transformation,” Paracelsus describes the catalyst of transmutation as sympathetic in property to the bisexual:

*Tinctura*, the last Arcanum, is like the *rebis*—the bisexual creature—which transmutes silver and other metals into gold; it “tinges,” i.e., it transforms the body, removing its harmful parts, its crudity, its incompleteness, and transforms everything into a pure, noble, and indestructible being. Here on earth the celestial fire is a cold, rigid, and frozen fire. And this fire is the body of gold. (148)

Although it is dependent upon the alterity of elements, transmutation is far from being conceptualized as the cause or result of impurity, and is, rather, the realization of the pure:

Nothing has been created as *ultima material*—in its final state. Everything is first created in its *prima material*, its original stuff, whereupon Vulcan comes, and by the art of alchemy deve-

lops it into its final substance. For alchemy means: to carry to end something that has not yet been completed, to obtain the lead from the ore and to transform it into what it was made for...Accordingly, you should understand that alchemy is nothing but the art which makes the impure into the pure by fire. (Paracelsus 141)

The application of this art is the means by which humans fulfil the obligation the Promethean gift places us under, a project that may only be realized by the skilful manipulation of the divine correspondences that link all things. The articulation of the relationship between the visible and the invisible that is the content of the alchemical sign: “These buried similitudes must be indicated on the surface of things; there must be visible marks for the invisible analogies” (OT 26).

In his declaration of resistance, Radek draws this web together: “Don’t make me light a match, because I will win this war of visibility. You can see fires and the queers who start them for kilometers, especially at night” (11). To transmute the invisible to the visible through the agency of fire is, for Radek, inextricable from queer dissent, and as the visible signifier of the property of queerness, fire links Promethean defiance to his own art, his own project of resistance. This affirmation of the creative power of alterity is extended through his description of the architectural rhythm of the fire tetrahedron. Each side of the tetrahedron (a Platonic solid, incidentally) is integral to the being of fire. The first plane symbolizes heat, the second, fuel, the third, an oxidizing agent. All of these are necessary for the event of fire, but it is the explicitly human act which calls each aspect into a manifestation of the elemental form:

Triangle 4: Chain reaction. Bingo. A catalyst has to bring these three triangles together, or else they're useless. The catalyst must be insistent—ergo, human—to ensure continuity, to press for a truly destructive flame. Someone has to flick the lighter, light the match, match the fire's intensity with their own will to keep it going. It's an act of violence, sure, but also creation. (17)

The link between the gift of fire and making dissent visible—the truly revolutionary act of making dissent, elemental dissent, visible—is made clear in Foucault's expression of the role of the catalyst:

These buried similitudes must be indicated on the surface of things; there must be visible marks for the invisible analogies. Is not any resemblance, after all, both the most obvious and the most hidden of things? Because it is not made up of juxtaposed fragments, some identical and others different, it is all of a piece, a similitude that can be seen and yet not seen. It would thus lack any criterion if it did not have within it—or above it or beyond it—a decisive element to transform its uncertain glimmer into a bright certainty. (OT 26)

I return these observations to Halse's and Currie's remark that “dissent within [Cox's] novels exceeds something merely felt to become something which compels action” (Halse and Currie, 6). It is in the moment of dissent that an uncertain glimmer is transmuted into a bright certainty.

### III: *Mythical Violence, Divine Violence*

Resistance does not exist as a pure state in and of itself. Its similitude to the alchemical understanding

of fire—to the fiery letters which Radek and Dorota shape to spell “Solidarity for Polish Queers” (Cox 42)—is one of both property and action. Yet resistance, as such, exists only in relationship to another elemental substance: power.

In his examination of the power of authoritarian law, Walter Benjamin marks a distinction between mythical and divine violence. Benjamin concerns himself with a particular rendering of accounts, but it is not one based upon a formal ethical system that adjudicates in which cases the justified ends of an act of violence render permissible its means. Rather, he directs his analysis to the violent origin of law itself. The law does indeed operate to formalize violence, giving it an affinity to a certain kind of proportionality: “This legal system tries to erect, in all areas where individual ends could be usefully pursued by violence, legal ends that can only be realized by legal power” (280). This containment, however, is dependent upon a disavowal of the original relationship between the two, in which violence is itself both the origin of law and that which the law attempts to mediate: “[i]n the exercise of violence over life and death, more than in any other legal act, law reaffirms itself” (286), and thus, “there is inherent in all such violence (*functional*) a law-making character” (283). However, violence is not solely the province of the imposition and exercise of power, as it simultaneously exists in a relationship of alterity to the law through which such power is articulated: “Violence, when not in the hands of law, threatens it not by the ends that it may pursue but by its mere existence outside the law” (281). Violence, then, is ambivalent, and Benjamin therefore argues that it cannot be conceptualized through the application of criteria based on means. It is, more properly, in and of itself a manifestation, examples of which, he writes, “are to be found, most significantly,

above all in myth. Mythical violence in its archetypal form is a mere manifestation of the gods. Not a means to their ends, scarcely a manifestation of their will, but first of all a manifestation of their existence” (294).

This logic is made clear by the violence enacted by Zeus upon the body of Prometheus in return for his deception—Zeus, as Hesiod recounts, was very well aware of Prometheus’s deception (and thus not deceived), and thus, the revenge he exacts is not in return for the transgression of a previously determined contract.<sup>3</sup> Aeschylus’s chorus voices both the manifest property of this violence and its inaugural function:

I see, Prometheus, and fear brings to my eyes  
 A mist full of tears  
 As I look upon your body  
 Withering away on a rock, made fast  
 With these outrageous bonds of adamant.  
 For new steersmen hold power on Olympus  
 And with laws that are new Zeus yields power  
 unlawfully  
 Those who had strength before he is now  
 annihilating. (144–51)

Mythical violence, which “establishes a law far more than it punishes for the infringement of one already existing” (294) is, for Benjamin, *necessary for the establishment of law as such*:

The moment of instatement does not dismiss violence; rather, at this very moment of lawmaking, it specifically establishes as law not an end unalloyed by violence, but one necessarily and intimately bound to it, under the title of power. Lawmaking is power making, and, to that extent, an immediate manifestation of vio-

lence. Justice is the principle of all divine lawmaking, power the principle of all mythical lawmaking. (295)

Although the gift of Prometheus is not the product of this violence, it does provoke it—that is, his creative act of resistance is, from one view, the founding condition for that same law that power claims governs its violent repression of resistance in general.<sup>4</sup>

As Cox’s novel illustrates, it is the application of mythical violence that renders queerness unlawful, because to be queer, in Radek’s town, is to be a person whose body is not subject to the laws that protect it from “unsanctioned” violence. It is precisely this “bloody power over mere life for its own sake” (Benjamin 297) which circumscribes queer eroticism: “The trouble is that neighbours, strangers, and family are always on the lookout for faggot activity. You live in perpetual fear of a crowbar smashing your skull and of death coming before you can feel the cum run out from your lips” (Cox 61). The subsequent scene, in which the mythicized violence of the football match is transposed into the arbitrary beating of a man designated as queer, elegantly represents the “legal violence of the myth” that Benjamin describes as “native to” Prometheus (294–5). In the moment in which the cameraman becomes a body subject to this violence, one of the agents of it articulates the similitude which links the two: “The scissor kick. Wisla would have won if they did the scissor kick. Let’s show him how we score a goal. Now your face will become a football, mother-fucker” (Cox 69).

Still, as Cox’s representation of the fundamental ambivalence of violence reminds me, the being of violence is not necessarily conditioned by power, by cruelty, by the desire to inaugurate law: it can also be

creative. As Benjamin writes: “Mythical violence is a bloody power over mere life for its own sake, divine violence pure power over all life for the sake of the living. The first demands sacrifice, the second accepts it” (297).

*IV: The Passionate Body: Transmutation and Care of the Self*

Desire, and especially revolutionary desire, is a kind of alchemy. It is configured by signs, but, somehow, in excess of it. And yet, desire is a form of self knowledge, bringing me to myself, and placing me in temporal alterity where I recognize my being in the moment that I recognize what I lack. But the moment of desire is not so much a melancholy void as it is a transmutation, one in which I wish, in place of my lack, to give—to make an impossible gift, to realize an impossible, excessive freedom. Radek, in a moment where he is finally freed to his desire, articulates this impossibility as one that is experienced in the body:

I didn't feel shame, nor did I hear any priestly voices reciting scripture. I wondered if this was a trick, if I was being saved by mere distraction. Did it matter? Instead of shame, I felt Michal's tongue trace figure-eights on my belly until it generated more electricity than I could bear. I wanted him to knife my gut open and drink its contents—semen would flow too slowly from my dick. (63)

Dorota experiences a similar moment of ecstatic renunciation in that moment when she returns to Radek what was given her in his letter. Lighting the police car that imprisons her on fire, Dorota makes this sign:

You could extinguish the outside, but the inside would keep on burning.

You could put the fire out completely, but its own sustained heat would reignite the flame. (151)

The transsubjectivity of Cox's narrative, mimetic as it is of the reciprocal obligation that characterizes solidarity, makes possible the enunciation of articulations of desire that are fundamentally different, yet governed by a poetics of similitude. But what I find, as I conclude, is that this poetics is one which articulates the fundamental ambivalence of the gift.

In his last published work, Michel Foucault calls to my attention the alchemical quality of solidarity. His reconsideration of philosophical principle of *epimelia heautor*, the care of the self, makes clear that such a project is realized, precisely, through transmutation, “obtainable only at the cost of a modification of the subject's being” (HS 27). Foucault describes this modification as one that occurs through the action of a particular kind of force: “This conversation may take place in the form of a movement that removes the subject from his current status and condition...let us call this movement, in either of its directions, the movement of *eros*” (16). It is this transformative force that is the progeny of Prometheus's rebellion. As fire, as writing, as *eros*, as *gift*, it is one which we are obliged to reciprocate, and thus is an obligation that takes as it gives. The *epimelia heautor* “postulates that for the subject to have right of access to the truth he must be changed, transformed, shifted, and become, to some extent and up to a certain point, other than himself. The truth is only given to the subject at a price that brings the subject's being into play” (HS 15).

In its ambivalence, solidarity is both an obligation and a demand for the reciprocation of that obligation. It is precisely of such an obligation that Mauss writes, “It is also because by giving one is giving *oneself*, and if one gives *oneself*, it is because

one ‘owes’ *oneself*—one’s person and one’s goods, to others” (emphasis in original, 46).

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<sup>1</sup> I would reject here any contented remark that solidarity erupts as a function of recognizing that “we’re all working together with just different strengths,” or some other such entry-level, feel-good kind of oversimplification. My experience with working in solidarity with other dissenting subjects leads me to believe that the more complicated notion of ambivalence that I am introducing has more traction, and more use.

<sup>2</sup> As gifts of the gods, signs are also the source of other arts: “Since nothing is so secret and hidden that it cannot be revealed, everything depends on the discovery of those things which manifest the hidden...Artists who make sculptures proceed no differently...and the more accomplished an artist would be, the more necessary it is that he master the art of signs” (Paracelsus 122).

<sup>3</sup> In fact, Benjamin distinguishes between violent and non-violent interchanges on the basis of whether or not there are sanctions for lying: “This makes it clear that there is a sphere of human agreement that is nonviolent to the extent that it is wholly inaccessible to violence: the proper sphere of ‘understanding,’ language” (289). The legal prohibition of fraud, for Benjamin, is not a proscription against deception as a violence as much as it is a pre-emptive subsumption of the possible violence which could result. Deception can occur between two subjects without being mediated through the power of the state, and the state’s intervention in this relationship indicates that its prohibition of violence is not a realization of natural law as much as it is the necessary precondition for its own monopoly on violent means: “In prohibiting fraud, law restricts the use of wholly non-violent means because they could produce reactive violence” (290).

<sup>4</sup> Here I am reminded of the very recently passed Canadian law that will make it permissible to jail anyone wearing a mask while participating in an unlawful assembly for up to ten years. The Canadian Criminal Code defines an unlawful assembly in such a manner as to render its interpretation quite arbitrary:

63. (1) An unlawful assembly is an assembly of three or more persons who, with intent to carry out any common purpose, assemble in such a manner or so conduct themselves when they are assembled as to cause persons in the neighbourhood of the assembly to fear, on reasonable grounds, that they
- (a) will disturb the peace tumultuously; or
  - (b) will by that assembly needlessly and without reasonable cause provoke other persons to disturb the peace tumultuously.
- (2) Persons who are lawfully assembled may become an unlawful assembly if they conduct themselves with a common purpose in a manner that would have made the assembly unlawful if they had assembled in that manner for that purpose.

As there is already a statue that prescribes an identical penalty for wearing a mask during the commission of a crime, it is evident that this law has been passed to render possible the arbitrary arrest of anyone wearing a mask at any time that he or she is in a group of more than three people. The law, however, has been justified by the argument that masked protesters are in and of themselves violent, a designation that justifies their summary arrest. The Member of Parliament who proposed the bill, Mr. Blake Richards, was explicit about his motivation, calling his bill “a new deterrent for people to wear disguises in the first place” (*Toronto Star*, May 9 2012).

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