December 2018

"I Have a Seat in the Abandoned Theater": Post-Foundational Subjects, Inoperative Teleologies, and the Aesthetics of Dispossession

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

What is the nature of political ‘reality,’ and in what ways are we capable of affecting it? Who (or what? and where?) is the subject of democratic politics? Of revolutionary politics? Are they opposed to one another? The grand narratives that ‘ground’ this project and the resistances that unground them form the basis for a post-foundational analytic of the subject of politics, of identity, and of community, which constitutes a mobilization of democratic resistance as a commitment to persistent (and in some cases, relentless) contestation, interruption, and disruption. These questions are explored through the argument that modern politics is a politics of exclusion, disidentification, and disruption, and that its potentialities for the subject depend upon whether or not we can appropriate these positions of spatio-temporal ambiguity as potential sites of action and resistance.

Throughout this project, the problems, possibilities, interruptions, and disruptions associated with the ‘marginal’ subject are explored. Elements of Kant’s aesthetic philosophy are presented alongside the work of Jacques Rancière, Jean-Luc Nancy, Alain Badiou, Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler, and Roberto Esposito in order to investigate the interdependency of politics and the political, identity and disidentification, inclusion and exclusion, and their impact on the political subject. Elaborating upon the possibility of a subject who is formed ‘outside’ of the space-times of democratic citizenship, several figures of exclusion are engaged throughout this project, eventually culminating in the interject: a position between inside and outside, between singularity and collectivity, who interrupts and disrupts and then retreats, always arriving and departing unexpectedly.
Keywords

Post-foundationalism, Subject, Politics, Identity, Community, Aesthetics, Democracy, Exclusion, Rancière, Badiou, Nancy, Derrida, Butler, Esposito
Acknowledgements

I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Mark F. N. Franke. His mentorship, close readings, generous and thoughtful commentary, endless personal and professional support, sensitivity, kindness, and seemingly infinite patience are, without a doubt, what have made this dissertation possible. I am thoroughly indebted and tremendously grateful to my second reader, Dr. Allan Pero, who, over the course of the last 14 years, has been an endless source of knowledge, inspiration, encouragement, solidarity, and good advice. He has managed to convince me, on more than occasion, that I am not, in fact, an imposter.

I extend the utmost thanks to my examination committee, Dr. Jan Plug, Dr. Antonio Calcagno, and Dr. James Ingram for having taken the time to read my work with great attention to detail, and for their insightful, challenging, and thought-provoking questions.

I would like to thank Dr. Franke, Dr. Pero, Dr. Plug, and Dr. Calcagno, alongside Dr. Tilottama Rajan, Dr. Brian Wall, Dr. Călin Mihăilescu, Dr. Steve Lofts, and Dr. Tom Carmichael for cultivating within me the gift of seeing the world through many different sets of eyes. To the many friends with whom I had the great fortune to share knowledge, revelations, successes, failures, and endless laughs, I couldn’t have asked for a better, more brilliant lineup. I must also thank the miraculous Melanie Caldwell, whose patience, support, and friendship over the years have rescued me from many a Kafkian scene.

I owe my most profound gratitude to Marty, whose love and support have never faltered, who never once so much as hinted that I should give up. To Rosie and Harvey, who have taught me that the far reaches of the imagination and the realities of everyday life are not mutually exclusive: the absolute absence of any limit to my love for you is what inspired me to think about the emancipatory potential of impossibility.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank Penelope Lister, who took this weird, funny, self-doubting girl writing from half way around the world under her wing, held open the door that would begin this journey, and kicked me through it.
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I say: How is this my concern? I'm a spectator
He says: No spectators at chasm's door... and no
one is neutral here. And you must choose
your part in the end
So I say: I'm missing the beginning, what's the beginning?
- Mahmoud Darwish, “I Have a Seat in the Abandoned Theater”

Introduction

The lines of exploration that structure this project branch out from two initial questions: first, why, in the 21st Century, do we continue to see a nostalgia for grand narratives when we have repeatedly witnessed the ‘terror’ that accompanies them? And second, how can we resist the temptation of regressing into these fantasies of totality and ‘wholeness’ when faced with the void that is opened in their retreat? The grand narratives that ‘ground’ this project and the resistances which unground and expose them form the basis for a post-foundational analytic of the subject of politics, of identity, and of community, which – far from being a cynical or pessimistic reduction of struggle – constitutes a mobilization of democratic resistance as a commitment to persistent (and in some cases, relentless) contestation, interruption, and disruption. The encounters that I stage in this project force us to confront certain questions again and again: what is the nature of political ‘reality,’ and in what ways are we capable of affecting it? Can political subjects form a community? Who (or what? and where?) is the subject of democratic politics? Of revolutionary politics? And finally, are they opposed to one another?

Far from the notion that modern politics is primarily concerned with the perfection of democracy via unity and consensus, I contend that modern politics is a politics of exclusion,

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1This is a nod to Lyotard in The Postmodern Condition, which I discuss at length in the introduction to chapter 1.
disidentification, and disruption. In light of this understanding of politics, I explore the problems and possibilities that arise for the ‘marginal’ subject. Those individuals and groups who continue to be marginalized owe this precarious position largely to a history that, despite decades of resistance, we cannot seem to move beyond. Although in many cases marginalized populations have been effectively stripped of their subjecthood and excluded from politics altogether, I argue here that this is but one form that the subject can take. My aim here is to describe a marginal subject, to find alternative forms of agency, and thus to discuss how we might uncover new points of resistance. This marginal subject cannot be precisely located, individuated, or rationalized, and yet the disruptions and interruptions it commits from the margins have a real, measurable impact. “Perhaps,” alongside Foucault, “we might say that some of the ideological conflicts that animate today’s polemics oppose the pious descendants of time and the willful inhabitants of space.”

This does not point to something like the ‘end of history,’ however, nor does it indicate a simple reversal in coming to privilege space over time. Instead, it indicates that we must nurture a certain degree of abstraction and uncertainty regarding the space-times of the subject, community, and politics. The possibilities that accompany this politics of exclusion for the subject are dependant upon whether or not we can appropriate these positions of spatio-temporal ambiguity as potential sites of action and resistance. For example, if we approach exclusion as the ‘absent center’ of totality, we begin to see its radical potential. I argue that it is indeed possible (and necessary) to do so, and I locate this possibility within post-foundational political thought – particularly in the work of Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Rancière, Alain Badiou, and Jacques Derrida – through which I engage in an examination of the relations between aesthetics, community, identities, ‘unworking,’ supplementarity, and this politics of exclusion.

After the deconstruction of totality and the subsequent demise of the ‘grand narrative,’ what is left of politics? I begin my approach to this question through the description of a politics of rupture and displacement that I argue characterizes contemporary French thought. This politics is a politics of totality as opposed to a politics in totality; it is a politics perpetually ‘out of place,’ as the lines between inside and outside, counted and uncounted, existent and inexistent continue to be problematized and radically contested, preventing it from settling into any fixed locus. I bring together certain elements of Kant’s aesthetic philosophy with perspectives on the work of Jacques Rancière, Jean-Luc Nancy, Alain Badiou, Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler, and Roberto Esposito in order to construct and support a narrative about the interdependancy of politics and the political, identity and disidentification, universality and particularity, totality and singularity, transcendence and immanence, and inclusion and exclusion. I contend that these relations not only establish those discursive norms which performatively produce and identify us as political subjects within a democracy, but they also inadvertently nurture the potential for critique and resignification within that order. One of the ways in which this becomes possible is through those encounters between: between ‘politics’ and ‘the political,’ between being and becoming, between identifications, between community and immunity, and between ‘inside’ and ‘outside.’ Specifically, I look to the ways in which these encounters can culminate in a political ‘event’ – the radical re-ordering of socio-political relations, which also serves as a declaration that another ordering of the world is possible, which includes not only new political configurations, but also new possibilities for the subject. What I contribute to this discussion becomes clearest in chapter 5, where I seek to uncover the possibility of a new subject position in the figure of the ‘interject,’ who works to challenge our understandings of which and what kind of identities matter most to politics.
In chapter 1, I discuss the relationship between politics and the political in terms of totality and force. Specifically, we can think of politics as a ‘force of unification,’ referring at once to the social imperative of gathering together, the limits and foundations upon which societies are built, and the imposition of those various forms of political unification (universals) which are curated by and through governments. The political, on the other hand, can be characterized as a ‘force of dislocation’ or disruption, the primary function of which is to subvert politics (and its unifying function) in order to expose its foundations as fundamentally contingent. If we instead think of politics as enacting a productive tension between unification and partitioning, are we then able to sustain a meaningful political engagement with others while retaining a sense of singularity/individual agency? In this discussion, I look to Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Claude Lefort, Oliver Marchart, Jacques Rancière, Alain Badiou, Gayatri Spivak, Zygmunt Bauman, Jean-François Lyotard, and Giorgio Agamben in terms of some of their responses to the problems related to representation and totality that we have inherited from Plato through to Carl Schmitt and Hannah Arendt.

In chapter 2, stemming from that discussion of representation, I argue that a politics rooted in identity is insufficient to foster the level of solidarity that is necessary to overcome the sense of forced consensus and invisibility that many marginalized populations experience in modern democracies. I engage in a post-foundational ‘reading’ of identity politics through Nancy, Derrida, and Rancière, arguing that one of the reasons we have yet to realize a tangible and lasting equality is related to an understanding of identity that has yet to fully embrace the ‘not-quite-representable.’ For example, despite its responsibility for the birth of identity politics as a politics that is rooted in specificity and difference, the politicization of every sphere of identity has effectively neutralized the radical potential it may once have
contained. I argue that while the argument that unjust hierarchies have been established as a result of privileging certain identities over others is certainly well-founded, the idea that we can come to resist these identity-based hierarchies by creating new ones is counterintuitive. Instead, we need a politics that radically disrupts the construction and circulation of these closed systems of identity. In chapter 1, I called this a politics of rupture and displacement, and here we become able to situate this politics in a space of ‘betweenness,’ following Rancière’s depiction of the political subject constituted ‘between’ identities. Subject formation of this kind requires a disidentification, a misrecognition, or a ‘wrong’ identification, which are discussed at length in this chapter, citing works by Rancière, Todd May, Judith Butler and José Esteban Muñoz. This leads me to argue that if a ‘post-identity’ politics is to become possible, its subject must be ‘inappropriable,’ that is, unidentifiable by any of the ‘right names’ that are typically used in the construction of a social identity. Before we can begin to understand the community and the subject in ways that are neither totalizing nor universally alienating, we must first lay the foundations for thinking a political subject (both individual and collective) that is actively and perpetually engaged in a process of becoming through disidentification and ‘unworking.’ I argue that the value of this shift in thinking lies in its dismantling of our dependence on identity as the central organizing principle of political action and resistance, which tends to render freedom, equality and community as afterthoughts rather than preconditions of political engagement.

In chapters 3 and 4, I extend these questions into an investigation of the identity of democracy (and of its subjects) in terms of the conditions of possibility through which the concepts of freedom, equality and community have acquired and held on to their pre-eminent political status. Using what is now perhaps the most infamous motto of the French

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3 The notion that disidentification is itself a politics is continued as a central theme in Chapter 5.
Revolution – *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité, ou la Mort!* – to guide this analysis, I examine its components both individually and as a set of relations. In chapter 3, I discuss the necessary interdependency and apparent incommensurability between freedom and equality, a tension which is perhaps most thoroughly explored in relation to democracy by Derrida in the operation of autoimmunity in *Rogues*, but is also present in the work of Nancy, Rancière, and Badiou. Derrida’s line of argument about democracy being ‘at war with itself’ flows into a reading of Wendy Brown’s notion of ‘de-democratization,’ which she says comes to us in two forms: first, it appears as either the cause or a symptom of the gradual erosion of sovereignty; and second, it comes in the form of an explicit and possibly even necessary unfreedom that belongs to democracy in both theory and practice. If this is true, the modern assumptions that freedom is a universal human desire and that it is the source of democracy’s legitimacy are highly problematic. Critical to linking this analysis to the broader critique of identity in my project is Brown’s argument that it was the birth of the *a priori* free moral subject in modernity that imbued democracy with its status as the only legitimate form of politics in the West, and yet it is the “white, masculine, and colonial face of this subject [that] has permitted and perpetuated democracy’s hierarchies, exclusions, and subordinating violences across the entirety of its modern existence.”

This discussion branches out to include questions about sovereignty and agency, and ultimately to the ways in which these tensions bring us to question the very possibility of democracy itself. I explore some of the ways in which democracy is forced to confront its own limits and (im)possibilities vis-à-vis encounters between politics (what I have called the force of unification) and the political (the force of dislocation). I turn this discussion toward three analyses that I see as containing the potential to counteract further de-democratization.

First, I look to Nancy’s characterization of political freedom in *The Experience of Freedom*. In this analysis, freedom is figured as both a founding and a revolutionary force. Freedom *opens space* by permitting “the reopening of the framework and the liberation from every establishment, or its overflowing, by freedom in its *each time* irreducible (re)beginning: this is the task of politics as the liberation of freedom, as the (re)opening of the space of its inaugural sharing.”5 This means, for example, that each shared demand contains the potential to rupture the already-given sense of the world *through* this spacing which freedom makes possible; since democracy is founded upon the idea of shared demand, I see this as promising. Likewise, I look to Rancière and Badiou in their work on equality and truth to uncover a similar potential for opening space, in this case for the liberation of equality. Despite their many differences, Rancière and Badiou see equality and truth respectively as revolutionary forces capable of rupturing or ungrounding the ‘already-given’ sense of the world.

Badiou, Rancière, and Nancy each advocate for a politics whose central purpose is overcoming obstacles to freedom and equality. Each also offers us critical points against which we can make claims to freedom and equality through those spaces that are opened up in order to overcome *un*freedom and *in*equality. For Badiou, this involves grasping and sharing a truth; for Rancière, this involves the universal presupposition of equality; for Nancy, this involves keeping politics open as a formless precondition for access to the possibilities of freedom and equality. Linking this back to my discussion of the subject, what we see in each of these cases is politics figured a process of *becoming* rather than as a fixed form; it is always in flux, arriving and retreating, and it is for this reason that I argue that perhaps its subject is, too. When politics is understood as being indeterminate in this sense,

when it is figured instead as *politicization* or *democratization*, it remains open-ended.

Likewise, as I come to argue in chapter 5, the subject of this politics is equally impossible to pin down or locate, perhaps never achieving a ‘complete’ subjectivation for this reason. Politics, for each of the thinkers I have gathered here, names the possibility of a *transformation*. Staging a political scene, even a radical one, involves a performative act of what Nancy calls *déclosion*, the reversal of a prior closing/foreclosure, through which we become able to *present* freedom, equality, community, and perhaps even the political subject in new ways wherever and whenever they are denied. Democratic politics is therefore both ‘action in common’ and, “action *against* the (existing configuration of the) common, which, when successful, reconfigures it.”

The majority of chapter 4 deals with the relations and juxtapositions between fraternity and community. By the late 20\textsuperscript{th} Century, we had all but agreed that fraternity had no place in the formation of political communities. Part of our problem with fraternity is that it is inherently exclusionary, designed to delimit a strict sense of inside and outside. Another problem, however, was that once the concept of fraternity was extended beyond actual familial limits, it came to rely almost exclusively upon affect (or a ‘feeling’ of brotherhood that is extended toward others in order to form the community) to bond its members, which is extremely difficult to administer and control, especially in a large-scale political context. The development of political communities that were grounded in particular identities (that is, an identity that is ‘contained’ in the individual prior to the existence of that community) could therefore be seen as a reaction to this difficulty, where identities were assumed to be much more stable. As I argue at length in chapter 2, however, this notion is equally problematic, exclusionary, and unstable. What I delve into here, therefore, is what I see to be emerging as

\cite{ibid., 224.
the theoretical ‘next step’: theorizing the impossibility of community. This can take many forms, and here I choose to focus on the ways in which Esposito, Nancy, Derrida, Rancière and Badiou each tackle this (im)possibility, through immunity, unworking, deconstruction, disidentification, and the community as unnameable, respectively.

At the end of this chapter, I return to “liberté, égalité, fraternité, ou la mort,” to complete my discussion of its significance to this project by focusing on the significance of ‘ou la mort,’ both on its own and in its modern absence from France’s official Republican motto. ‘*Ou la mort*’ has a significant role to play in the politics of supplementarity that I outline in chapter 5 through its role as both void and surplus. ‘*Ou la mort*’ turns this otherwise benign list of political ideals into a war cry; it is what ‘activates’ the slogan, what (paradoxically) gives it its revolutionary life force. But how does it do this? Is ‘*ou la mort*’ a constitutive void or is it the surplus that causes politics to erupt? To begin by drawing upon Rancière’s formula, I argue that the ‘*ou*’ of ‘*ou la mort*’ also signifies a constitutive void: it represents as alternative the very impossibility or absence of an alternative, and thus is responsible for the creation of the political space in which revolution becomes possible. Where ‘*ou*’ is the void, then, ‘*la mort*’ becomes the supplement – for equality, for freedom, for fraternity, etc. This is, therefore, not a reference to the role of ‘death’ in the regulatory processes of political life (in the case of biopolitics, death is certainly figured as surplus). Instead, the void is produced as an effect of the phrase taken in its entirety – ‘or death’ – as a place holder, an impossible alternative to a particular manner of living which has itself become impossible. That is to say, it tells us that there simply is no alternative to ‘liberty, equality, fraternity’ as a way of life, that is not impossible.

Building upon this discussion in chapter 5, I explore how these relations are responsible for – and yet unable to account for – those excluded, disidentified, disposessed
singularities which are at once a direct effect of an increasingly globally entrenched ideal of capitalist democracy, yet are somehow figured as existing ‘outside’ of this system. In the first sections of this chapter, I demonstrate the necessity of aesthetics in tracing these figures, and in navigating the ambiguous ‘non-spaces’ which they occupy. Through an examination of Badiou’s ‘inexistent,’ I work through the presumed interconnectedness between existence and appearance (and thus also between inexistence and invisibility). The following sections deal with ‘placing’ this potential subject, asking not only who occupies the ‘outside,’ but also investigating the manner in which it is occupied. I look here at the politicization of exclusion through the positions of dispossession, statelessness, precariousness and vulnerability, primarily in the work of Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, Robert Kaiser, and Roberto Esposito. I explore the notion that certain conditions of exteriority potentially offer us a radical ‘placing’ (the acknowledgement of a spatio-temporally ambiguous position) through which we can continue to rethink political agency, and which has the potential to become a site of political subjectivation. I examine figures of exclusion throughout this project: homo sacer, the stranger, the subaltern, the part with no part, the inexistent, the dispossessed, and the reject. This survey culminates in the figure-position of the interject: a position between inside and outside, between singularity and collectivity, who interrupts and disrupts and then retreats, always arriving and departing unexpectedly. Its singularity lies in its radical openness, as a condition (of instability) determined through the extensiveness of discourses of closure, totality, and end, rather than a particular position within those discourses.

Using Rancière’s notion of the people as ‘supplementary subject’ as a starting point, I use this final chapter to trace the contours of what we could call a politics of ‘inclusive exclusion’ - or more simply, a politics of supplementarity – whose subject is never immediately locatable due to its condition as peripheral, spectral, inexistent, dispossessed, or
rejected. This subject interjects – it appears unexpectedly to interrupt the apparent harmony of a given system, withdrawing just as unexpectedly to appear anew in a new context. This idea continues to build upon my assertion in the preceding chapter that disidentification is itself a politics whose subject exists in a state of perpetual becoming. The politics of supplementarity is therefore not about the *fact* of one’s visibility, but about *becoming visible* (appearing) in unexpected ways, in unexpected places, at unexpected times, or not at all, as ways in which the subject can assert its sovereignty. In this politics, one cannot ask ‘where is the subject?’ because this amounts not only to a demand to pin the subject down to its ‘proper place,’ but also to a narrow and fixed definition of the subject. If we ask instead, ‘what are the subject’s *possible orientations*?’ we leave sufficient room for the movement of alternative senses and meanings for its possible (inoperative) teleologies and (dis)locations.

While I feel safe in arguing that certain subject-positions have lost their necessary centrality to democratic or leftist politics (e.g., the self-present individual), this does not mean that the notion of the subject has lost its importance altogether in contemporary political thought, especially in light of the struggle for equality. I firmly believe that by focusing instead on an understanding of the subject as ‘decentered,’ ‘contingent,’ and/or ‘multiple,’ etc., it has become possible to sidestep identity politics by acknowledging a radical plurality in these sites of struggle (rather than re-inscribing a hierarchy) through something like the presupposition of and fidelity to equality. It remains necessary, therefore, that a subject-agent enact this shift, and all signs in contemporary theory seem to point to a preference for a collective or multiple subject. The ‘other’ subject of democracy, ‘the people’ (as opposed to the self-interested individual) might be a good candidate here, but it is unclear if that subject position is adequate to this task. Specifically, its formation *within* and *after* –
or, following Foucault, as an **effect** of – the establishment of democracy is problematic, specifically in terms of its radical potential to disrupt that very establishment.

While we seem to have lost faith in the foundations upon which modern subjects, States and institutions are constructed, we nevertheless maintain those foundations and the narratives associated with them thorough the ways in which we conduct ourselves politically. In *Politics Out of History*, Wendy Brown characterizes this phenomenon through the argument that our refusal to let go of those fundamental principles that define the modernist project, such as progress, right, universal morality, sovereignty, free will, ‘T’truth, and reason falls directly in line with the epistemological structure of the fetish as Freud described it: “I know, but still…”

That is to say, for example, that even though we know that neoliberal ideologies of ‘progress’ that have described the political-cultural narratives of the ‘Western world’ for over half a century are not only unsustainable but morally unconscionable, we continue to operate politically as though we weren’t aware of any of that. Brown writes, “when a disintegrating political or cultural narrative seems irreplacable, panicked and reactionary clutching is inevitable (…).” It isn’t enough, therefore, to simply dismiss these foundations without exploring the alternatives; otherwise it would appear to most people as though we had no choice but to maintain the status quo, regardless of what we know about the kinds of violence associated with it.

The biggest challenge facing theorists who are attempting to uncover new political and epistemological possibilities boils down to the fact that the future they offer us glimpses of will never be as reassuring as the one we were offered through the discourses of liberalism, philosophical modernism, and perhaps especially, democracy. While certain out-

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7 Wendy Brown, *Politics Out of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 4. To paraphrase Freud further, the argument goes as follows: even though I *know* that the fetishized object does not really contain the high value I have attributed to it, I nevertheless continue to act as though it does.

8 Ibid, 4.
dated paradigms promised stability, progress, certainty (both ethical and scientific), and most importantly, ‘perfection,’ most of what we have been able to offer from a more contemporary perspective is a series of new possibilities arising out of destabilization, uncertainty, paradox, and this notion of unworking space and time through an ‘inoperative teleology’ and the non-place that manifest in ‘post-’ discourses. For example, it is not difficult to make the case that both modernity and liberalism are founded upon the ‘truth’ of their respective (and often intersecting) teleologies. The project of Enlightenment was premised upon the notion that a learned class had managed to reason its way out of a time of deep intellectual and cultural darkness, while the project of deconstruction undermines the primacy of reason and knowledge as foundational or universal. It is therefore not at all surprising that deconstruction continues to be viewed with suspicion and hostility. We would rather hold to the notion that democracy is the key to the perfection of politics, and through it, as the rhetoric goes, the perfection of humanity.

Popular faith in the idea that democracy can provide a neutral terrain upon which people of all backgrounds, orientations and beliefs can peacefully coexist has not only persisted, it is still thriving as the dominant ideology in Western (and arguably, Global) political thought, even though it repeatedly fails to fulfill this promise. For example, the Left’s primary commitment has been and will continue to be the formulation of universal procedures for legitimizing the use of power that can claim validity by virtue of their very ‘impartiality’ towards racial, ethnic and sexual difference. Despite the many ways in which (neo)liberal ideology continues to withstand the force of postmodern, poststructural, and postfoundational critique and remains dominant, it is interesting to note that this would not be possible without its near total reliance upon the emancipatory promise of a future-to-
come in which the oppressed past is redeemed. What holds the system together, what allows us to retain a sense of community that is unbroken by the fact of our inequality, is a normative identification with and commitment to the democratic ideal of equality which is shared by all. Todd May, one of the most influential readers of Rancière’s work on equality, argues that it is this ethical dimension which allows dissensus to circulate without necessarily culminating in violence. It makes a democratic politics “compelling not only to those who struggle but to those who do not,” binding “those who struggle and those against whom they struggle.” This normative element is what May calls “the universality without transcendence that underpins a democratic politics.”

In Rancière’s work, the political (what he calls ‘politics’) designates neither an existing situation nor a specific way of living. Instead, it names an event in which the existing situation or way of living – the distribution of the social – is disrupted through the revelation of its tenuous foundations, whose fragility opens up the possibility of a different way of living. A political event can therefore be defined as an ‘event of perception,’ where the political can no longer be contained in its abstract ‘eventness’ (in its retreat) and it rushes in to flood the field of perception, thus creating the conditions through which political subjects can emerge. In his Introduction to Aesthetic Democracy, Thomas Docherty’s description of the event of culture mirrors this discussion. He defines culture as that which “calls a human subject to differ from itself, and to find or to constitute its very identity precisely through the specific mode of that differing. It therefore names the possibility of a

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9 This statement combines (or even conflates) both Benjamin’s and Derrida’s notions of messianism, but I believe that liberal ideology relies on both Benjamin’s concept of a past redeemed and Derrida’s ‘out of joint’ way of looking to past and future simultaneously as well as his affirmation of the future-to-come.
10 Todd May, The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2008), 112.
11 Ibid., 112.
transformation, a change in our ordinariness that is occasioned by aesthetics or art.”  
According to Doherty, we call this change history, understood in terms of both “our historical becoming and our becoming historical.”  
Taking this a step further, he suggests that democracy, like the political, is not a constant, and thus not a political mode of being. Instead, he follows Rancière in arguing that real democracy is rare and fleeting, becoming manifest only through moments “in which the possibility of an ethical respect for selfhood, a selfhood that is marked by change, discovers or reveals itself to be conditioned by alterity, or by our condition of being-with-otherness.”  
This ‘selfhood marked by change’ is indicative of the subject of a becoming rather than a fixed being. In this sense, Doherty uncovers in Rancière’s understanding of democracy the very “condition of our becoming human,” allowing him to argue that, ultimately, a democracy that emerges alongside politics (in Rancière’s understanding) is the condition of possibility for our becoming-historical, both at the level of the social and at the level of the human.  
The literal ‘end of history,’ then, is not to be found in the culmination of human political experience in a large-scale consensus regarding the legitimacy of democracy as the favored form of government, but in the eradication of the very possibility of democracy.

In The Illusion of the End, Jean Baudrillard posits three hypotheses as an attempt to explain the ‘end of history.’  
What he is really referencing in each of these hypotheses is not truly the cessation of a sequence or series of events, but rather the effacement of any meaning that we have, up to now, been able to ascribe to those events. Thus, in each of his examples, history itself does not really cease to exist; it becomes meaningless. In other words, history

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13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., iv.
15 Ibid.
loses its ‘historicity.’ Following in Heidegger’s footsteps, Baudrillard’s first two hypotheses explore the connection between temporality and history, specifically in terms of the ways in which the speeding up or slowing down of time can directly impact our ability to perceive (or more precisely, to cease to perceive) history in a meaningful way.17 His third hypothesis, however, draws our attention to the connection between history and teleology, and it is on this line of inquiry that I would like to dwell for a moment here, given the important role that teleology has to play in this project. In this third analogy, Baudrillard draws our attention to yet another point of disappearance, this time through aesthetics rather than temporality. He calls this vanishing point the “stereophonic effect,” and in this example he asks the following question: “where is the high-fidelity threshold beyond which all music disappears?”18

Referring to our obsession with mixing and remixing, amplifying, adjusting and multiplying musical tracks in search of ‘flawless sound,’ Baudrillard argues that music eventually “dissappears into the perfection of its materiality […] beyond [which] point, there is neither judgment nor aesthetic pleasure. It is the ecstasy of musicality, and its end.”19 After drawing out of this analogy a similar conclusion about the dissapearance of history via its ‘perfection’ in the immediacy of the new news media, he goes on to draw his conclusion: “we shall never again know what anything was before dissappearing into the fulfillment of its model.”20 It is upon this last point – which I interpret as a warning as well as an observation – that I will focus briefly here.

What does Baudrillard’s hypothesis have to tell us about the state of contemporary politics? About the state of democracy in particular? About the subject? We can certainly

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18 Baudrillard, Illusion, 5.
19 Ibid., 5. My emphasis.
20 Ibid., 6.
apply it to those discourses in which the ‘end of politics’ refers to its perfection, either in the form of a universal peace or the absolute realization of certain political ideals such as freedom, equality, and community. This amounts to an attempt to realize what some might refer to as the Truth of Politics, the pursuit of which has remained the standard rhetoric and programme for political idealists of nearly every ideological persuasion across the centuries. We continue to see it in campaign promises, public policy and legislation at the local, national and international level. The dimension of this kind of discourse, which often goes unspoken, is that any realization of a perfection of politics, in whichever form it might take (democracy, socialism, fascism, etc.), necessarily entails the closure of alternatives, or, to a certain degree, the depoliticization of politics in other forms. No antagonism, no dissensus would be possible if we were to realize this ‘Truth,’ because by definition, the absolutization of ideals – equality, freedom, community, for example – would require nothing short of absolute consensus. The ensuing instrumentalization, rationalization, and location of every facet of socio-political existence renders an ‘outside’ impossible to locate, and what would be excluded out of necessity would be expertly concealed. Once again, we arrive at the terror of totality.

We immediately confront two of the dangers of this kind of teleology here. If we think about outcomes, we have on one hand, the possibility that it will not happen, but that the dominant logic of this telos will remain the same and thus our political landscape will remain more or less what it is today. On the other hand, we have the more remote possibility that it will happen, but anyone who has taken time to consider what the real consequences of such an ‘end’ would be knows that the outcome would not be the idyllic scene of peace and accord that its proponents envision. At the very least, the effacement of difference is in itself a form of violence. More than this, however, we are talking about a new social order: any
power capable of establishing a social order through which widespread obedience or loyalty would need to be legitimized – for legitimation is always an ideological process – entails a certain type of social division and organization which lands us essentially right back where we began.

My question at this point becomes, is there a third possibility? One perhaps whereby this fantasy is eventually crushed under the sheer weight of its own contradictions? More importantly, can we force its hand by cutting to the heart of this logic and opening the possibility for these alternatives to emerge? While I do not pretend to be offering up such an alternative here, I approach this problem through the most prominent thinkers of post-foundationalism – namely, Jacques Rancière, Jean-Luc Nancy, Alain Badiou and Jacques Derrida – who are largely responsible for keeping these ‘other’ possibilities open. It is in this context that I put forth the thesis that one of the crucial steps in doing so involves a radical rethinking of exclusion as the ‘unworking’ of the spaces (the non-place) and times (an inoperative teleology) of politics through the interventions of aesthetics, deconstruction, and the political. Weaving together certain facets of the work of Rancière, Nancy, Badiou, Derrida, Judith Butler, Roberto Esposito and others on politics, aesthetics, community, deconstruction, democracy, exclusion, and supplementarity, I offer in this project a postfoundational politics of the subject whose formation is dependent upon this unworking of time and space, which simultaneously acknowledges the importance of ‘ends’ in political praxis but prevents these discourses from unfolding in a linear progression toward an idealized future moment, and actively resists, through its very constitution, any attempt to locate or assign it a ‘proper place.’

As the lines between inside and outside, counted and uncounted, existent and inexistent continue to be problematized and radically contested, so do our understandings of
which and what kind of identities matter most to politics. If we side with Deleuze in that the purpose of contemporary critical political thought is realized in “contributing to the invention of a people,” then we must shift our attention away from the repeated re-inscription and representation of one that already exists.  

Although the 21st century has thus far been defined by massive shifts in the ways in which we inter-act – for example, the proliferation of technologically mediated interactions and experiences, a focus on the formation and self-transformation of the subject (an ‘aesthetics of existence’ perhaps), and a renewed focus on the bodily dimension of political subjectivity – it would be naïve and perhaps even dangerous to announce the ‘end of identity politics,’ as if we had somehow managed to transcend identity as a defining feature of experience. Instead, we are continuing to enact a slow turning away from the notion of subjectivity as grounded in individual identity toward the idea that there might be a stronger connection between anonymity and solidarity in the notion of a collective political subject. Whatever problems or challenges we find within identity politics and/or democracy itself, however, demands for self-determination, questions of power and legitimacy, resistance to domination, and the search for new spaces for resistance and alternative subject positions remain.

Chapter 1: A Politics ‘Out of Place’

This epigraph, quoted at length from *The Postmodern Condition*, captures the spirit in which I have undertaken this project. That Lyotard links ‘totality’ and ‘terror’ is demonstrative of a deep reflection on milleniums of exploitation and oppression perpetrated by those in power.\(^\text{22}\) There is a direct connection between this will to domination and the desire to impose a ‘grand narrative’ on the multitudes, often with the intention of breeding consensus by force.\(^\text{23}\) He rightly points out that this strategy is consistently justified (and continues to be excused) on the basis of a false belief that these narratives somehow capture reality rather than attempt to command it. Even in the post-WWII, post-Cold War world, where there is a widespread demand for liberation from this kind of domination, these strategies (and the call for them) nevertheless persist. The solution to this problem lies directly with our ability to demonstrate that no such hold is possible between those narratives.


\(^{23}\) During the tumultuous years between the end of WWI and the end of WWII, for example, fascist and quasi-fascist movements cropped up in dozens of countries, the most famous of which belonging to Germany, Italy, Japan, Spain, France, China, Chile, Greece, Portugal, Hungary and Yugoslavia. While the notion of imposing a ‘grand narrative’ upon the multitudes is in no way limited to fascist ideology, it does provide the most extreme and overt examples of how this strategy operates. I would argue that the ‘big three’ narratives that exemplify the ‘nostalgia for the whole and the one’ to which Lyotard refers would be Fascism, Communism and Democracy.
and the reality they claim to depict, that no such unity exists. Instead, he demands, we must seek out and revel in alternatives, in the volatility of difference rather than the totality of uniformity. Returning to the introduction, the questions which have inspired this project are: first, why, in the 21st century, do we continue to see this nostalgia for totality and grand narratives when we have repeatedly witnessed the terror that accompanies them; and second, how do we ‘[bear] witness to the unpresentable’ and ‘activate the differences’ in order to wage this very different kind of war on terror?

In this chapter, I address these questions in a few ways. With regard the the first question, I have left aside for now its analysis from the perspective of those grand narratives with which we are unfortunately over-familiar: those toxic remnants of certain fascist movements such as Nazism, which are directly linked to racist, nationalistic and xenophobic ideologies. Although these discourses undoubtedly continue to resurface daily on the front lines of politics, I have chosen instead to begin by discussing a much more benign yet no less powerful narrative that took hold in the 20th century: ‘the personal is the political’ and its successor, ‘everything is political,’ which quickly established itself as a discourse that stands in direct opposition to those ideologies listed above. At their core, these narratives are founded upon a politics of non-discrimination, the struggle for recognition and inclusion, and the dissolution of hierarchy and domination. Yet despite the undoubtedly good intentions upon which each is grounded, neither is immune to the ‘terror’ of totality; what’s more, there are ways in which each can be said to be inadvertently complicit in the production of this terror.

With regard to the notion that everything is political, there is the implicit risk in this way of thinking for this politics to become totalitarian: as Jean-Luc Nancy writes, this
attitude entails the “‘political’ absorption of every sphere of existence.” As a response to this problem, I discuss the theoretical phenomenon that took hold in the late 1980s and early 1990s of ‘splitting’ the concept of politics by differentiating ‘politics’ from ‘the political.’

Popularized by Claude Lefort, the notion of ‘the political’ is responsible for reopening the possibility of specificity for politics in distinguishing it from other disciplines, and thus it is also constitutive of politics. Put another way, once again by Nancy, “‘the political’ seems to present the nobility of the thing – which thereby implicitly regains its specificity, and thus its relative separation.” What was needed to overcome a totalitarian understanding of politics (politics as all-encompassing) was what Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe referred to as the ‘double gesture’ of reinventing the specificity of politics and its ‘other.’ It is important to note here, however, that these thinkers are not advocating for the complete closure of politics to all other discourses in order to regain this specificity. The point is instead for the discourse of politics to retain its own sense and meaning rather than absorbing or being absorbed by other discourses. The political is what allows politics to be presented as such, and thus is also responsible for our ability to draw connections between discourses – such as between politics and aesthetics – in order to complement, contrast or enhance our understanding of its meaning.

This split is significant, then, not only because it prevents us from thinking politics as a ‘total’ concept (a whole, a One), but more importantly because that prohibition actively resists terror, preventing the “political absorption of every sphere of existence.” I argue

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26 Nancy, *Chronicles*, 27.
further that this critique also applies to the idea that ‘the personal is the political.’ Despite its responsibility for the birth of ‘identity politics’ as a politics that is rooted in specificity and difference, the politicization of every sphere of identity amounts to a very familiar problem. Moreover, while the argument that unjust hierarchies are established as a result of privileging certain identities over others is certainly well-founded, the idea that one can resist these identity-based hierarchies by creating new ones is counterintuitive. I argue that what we need instead is a politics that radically disrupts the construction and circulation of these closed systems. I see this politics of rupture and displacement exemplified in the work of thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Rancière and Alain Badiou. This leads us directly to answer my second question regarding how we are to ‘bear witness to the unpresentable’ and ‘activate the differences’ in order to overcome the terror of totality. What I am essentially asking in the final section is this: after the deconstruction of totality and the subsequent demise of the ‘grand narrative,’ what is left of politics? My answer, once more, is that I see the politics of rupture and displacement – the politics of totality, a politics perpetually ‘out of place’ – as the most exciting response to date, and by far the most promising in terms of staging our resistance to the terror of totality.

(i) If everything is political, then Everything is political: totality, politics, aesthetics

The claim that ‘everything is political’ is, arguably, what simultaneously announced a new era in political thought (identity politics) and its challenger (post-foundational critique). In a piece entitled “Is Everything Political?” Jean-Luc Nancy argued that before more recently taking up residence at the margins of our thinking, this sentiment was definitive of
the ‘modern,’ that is, the last two hundred years of political thought, despite our only having confronted the claim directly in the latter half of the 20th century. According to Nancy’s analysis, there are several different ways in which this claim has been made. In one sense, it refers to a particular form of distribution by which all of the various moments or elements of our shared existence belong to that moment or element that we call ‘the political’; in another sense, it can denote a form of domination, by which all other spheres are subsumed under it and thus controlled and determined by it; and finally, in yet another sense, it can refer to an integration through the idea that “the essence of existence as a whole is of a political nature.”

Regardless of which of these descriptors is the most accurate, we are left with the impression that the notion that ‘everything is political’ assumes and affects a strong connection between politics and totality. This totality is, in turn, intimately bound to a kind of determinism that severely limits the existential, epistemological and ethical possibilities through which we are able to experience the world. Extending this connection, when one takes on the position that everything is political, politics also begins to lose its specificity. Nancy argues that the political in this case becomes ‘totalitarian’ insofar as “the horizon of thought is that of a ‘political’ absorption of every sphere of existence.” Similarly, in Retreating The Political, Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe describe politics as having abandoned its specificity through the claim that everything is political, where politics comes to assume dominion over the whole of existence.

Immediately, I offer the argument that totality tends to be just as much an aesthetic problem as a political one. For example, we can turn for a moment to thinking totality in

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30 For example, an often repeated criticism of Marxism is that its envelopment of all socio-political woes under the umbrella of the capital-labour relation.
31 Nancy, Chronicals, 25.
32 See especially Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, “The ‘Retreat’ of the Political,” Retreating the Political, 122-134.
terms of Kant’s understandings of presentation (Darstellung) and representation (Vorstellung). Politically speaking, totality can be understood as a particular way in which a population is made visible (presented), “a figure characterized by the force of its illustrations, its synoptic qualities, its sublime connotations.” Specifically, it objectifies a population in such a way so as to ascribe and define definite boundaries to it based on particular qualities that are upheld as universally good. This objectification via presentation echoes Lyotard’s description of “the nostalgia of the whole and the one, the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible” that feeds those oppressive grand narratives against which he writes so passionately. The teleology that is associated with this mode of practicing politics implies some kind of perfection, through homogeneity, which is typically represented in ideologies that espouse a kind of ‘harmony in unity.’ The subject, and perhaps even the concept of community itself, fall prey to a discourse through which they become not only complicit in their own objectification, but in their obliteration as well. This kind of thinking is certainly at the core of totalitarianism, but it is in no way limited to it; Lyotard referred to this as the ‘terror’ of totality. Speaking precisely to this point, Judith Butler writes: “One thinks one is opposing Fascism, only to find that the identificatory source of one’s own opposition is Fascism itself, and that Fascism depends essentially on the kind of resistance one offers.”

I would like to pause here and set up another related line of argumentation coming out of this discussion of politics and totality that I take up in chapter 2. The 1960’s slogan ‘the personal is the political’ ultimately gave rise to the movement we have come to call ‘identity politics,’ where politics is shaped by communities formed on the basis of certain

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33 I explore the connections between politics and Kant’s aesthetics in greater depth throughout this project, most notably in Chapters 2 (the beautiful and the sublime), 4 (Darstellung, Vorstellung) and 5 (Parergon, Ergon).
35 Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, 81.
aspects of one’s identity such as sex, race, sexual orientation, religion, economic status, occupation, gender identity, language, education, etc. The idea behind these associations was born out of the need for strength in numbers for minority groups in order to advocate for civil rights and end oppression. One could make the case, however, that even identity politics has been swept up in the net of this ‘politics in totality’ in the sense that identity and/or difference is often proffered as a ‘final ground’ or ultimate foundation around which we then structure our understandings of the world, a new grand narrative offering a new totality. This problem is definitive of what Judith Butler termed the ‘metaphysics of substance,’ which assumes a self-identical subject with certain core aspects of her identity defined prior to her socialization. This position in many cases actually depoliticizes identity, which runs directly counter to the movement’s original aim of politicizing the personal.

The demand for recognition nevertheless remains at the forefront of political action, just as the operation of totality remains a constant problem for those who seek recognition within the various socio-political or economic frameworks through and from which they have been excluded. Furthermore, we tend to seek this recognition at the political level not as individuals but collectively, through the recognition of ‘shared difference’ rather than at the level of singularity. It is possible that this is the result of working within a system that has always championed the unity of its objects over their multiplicity. We are in search of a collective that doesn’t constitute a ‘whole,’ and of collective action that is not undertaken

37 For a reading of the original articulation, see Carol Hanisch, “The Personal Is the Political,” in Notes From the Second Year: Women’s Liberation, eds. Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt (New York: Radical Feminism, 1970), 76-77.
39 It is notable, however, that some more radical proponents of identity politics do offer solutions to this problem. For example, Gayatri Spivak’s ‘strategic essentialism’ dictates that one can act as if an identity were consistent in order to achieve short-term political goals without implying any innate authenticity to that identity. See Sara Harasym (Ed.), The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues (New York: Routledge, 1990), 1-16.
under the banner of an absolute. Referencing Foucault in his essay “What is a dispositif?” Gilles Deleuze writes, “the One, the All, the True, the object, the subject, are not universals, but singular processes – of unification, totalisation, verification, objectivation, subjectivation – present in the given apparatus [dispositif].”\(^{40}\) Through this lens, we come to talk about degrees of unity rather than capital ‘U’ Unity. There are, in other words, many ways of being ‘one’ other than as part of a totality. For example, I offer that something like ‘being-together-being-against’ could be one such ‘degree’ of unity, where of course there would be many possible ways of occupying this position. I characterize this turn in our thinking about the relation between politics and totality as having designated the shift from the modern ‘politics in totality’ to the post-structural/post-foundational ‘politics of totality.’ This shift has revealed a more dynamic, fluid, transitional notion of politics that resists totality through unpredictability, a built-in resistance to grand narratives, and its openness and susceptibility to the influence of other discourses with which it has always already been enjoying varying degrees of correlation.

One such discourse, which has enjoyed a great deal of attention in contemporary French theory in relation to politics and that I take up at length in this project, is aesthetics.\(^{41}\) I approach the obvious question, ‘what does aesthetics have to do with navigating the relation between politics and totality?’ in a number of ways, each way harkening back to the constellation of concepts found in Kant’s work on aesthetics. With respect to the idea of understanding ‘unity’ in terms of degree rather than totalization, we can look to Kant’s work on aesthetic judgment (specifically in terms of the beautiful and the sublime). This work


\(^{41}\) The contemporary French theorists to which I refer here explicitly take up both aesthetics and politics directly, such as Jacques Rancière and Alain Badiou. I also argue that the work of Jean-Luc Nancy and to a lesser extent Jacques Derrida takes up this connection indirectly yet with great effect.
offers up the paradoxical notion of ‘subjective universal’ judgments, where we make judgments based on the assumption that others ought to agree with us while acknowledging that there is no determinate or absolute concept demanding that agreement. These ‘subjective universal’ judgments effectively create a community (the sensus communis) that is based on a temporary solidarity – politically speaking, not unlike Spivak’s ‘strategic essentialism’ – that is not rooted in a final ground or universal principle. This notion is what inspired my close attention to both Kant’s aesthetics and to post-foundationalism in relation to questions of unity in politics, which I take up at length in chapters two and five respectively.

The concepts of freedom, justice and equality, though not exclusively the property of politics, can rightly be considered ‘political concepts.’ The attempt to universalize these concepts, however, crosses that blurred line into what I consider to be an aesthetic practice that renders these concepts more and more difficult to situate or define in ways that are meaningful for political praxis. This is perhaps a result, at least in part, of a phenomenon akin to ‘disinterestedness’ as Kant described it in the Critique of Judgment. The kinds of judgments we make about justice, freedom and equality are culturally subjective to say the least, yet in order to attempt to universalize these judgments, we must believe that they are objective and thus disinterested. The universalizing force of disinterested aesthetic judgment has historically served to silence the so-called ‘national collective’ by allowing an acculturated middle class to speak for the whole of the population, and this is no less true in the practice of politics. This observation is in no way intended to promote those arguments through which aesthetics is reduced to an effect or product of ideology, however. This is


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simply one of the myriad ways in which we can navigate the relation between politics and totality.

In approaching these issues through the lens of sublimity, I shift our focus to encounters with ‘formless objects’: objects that defy reason and experience, and in so doing, represent limitless possibility. Posed as an opposition to reason, the sublime involves a transcendence of rational thought and language, but this transcendence is always incomplete. Nancy’s ‘transimmanence’ is a fitting term to apply retroactively here, in this case perhaps referring to an experience in which sensation, emotion and imagination momentarily transcend reason, but ultimately remains tethered to it. What is most significant to this discussion is that this experience offers its subject a glimpse of a ‘beyond’ of reason, where reason (especially during the Enlightenment) was presented as a closed and all-encompassing system. Getting that glimpse of its ‘outside’ meant acknowledging that there were possibilities beyond reason; through the sublime, we witness the unpresentable, to use Lyotard’s phrasing once again. Though Kant’s intention was certainly not for us to see the sublime as a means through which to wage war on the totalizing force of reason, it nevertheless left room for ‘other’ possibilities.

The second half of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* is dedicated to teleological judgment, which for Kant was largely akin to the application of the (totalizing) structure of reason to the natural world. Uncovering an ‘end’ or ‘purpose’ (and therefore also a chain of causality) in all natural organisms and phenomena is common in Enlightenment thinking as an attempt to ‘tame’ the wild unknown. The aim was to apply a grand narrative to the natural world to impose order and affirm the superiority of human reason. My question at this point is whether or not, perhaps again through the crack in this perfect system that is made by the

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44 I discuss Nancy’s concept of ‘transimmanence’ at length in chapter 5.
sublime, we might glimpse other possibilities vis-à-vis teleology that we could then use in resisting totality. I argue that we can, of course, but this requires a radical departure from Kant’s teleology; or rather, like an encounter with the sublime, I offer a transimmanent understanding of teleology that both transcends Kant’s, but also ultimately remains tethered to it. Distancing our thinking from a teleology through which political actions and objects are judged according to their ends, ultimately creating a closed loop, we must instead approach teleology as contingent, remaining open to its own ‘undoing.’ Among other things, this would mean acknowledging that purposes and ends are always already necessarily plural. From this deconstructivist standpoint, for example, it points to a politics of totality that simultaneously affirms hegemony and resistance. This politics is defined, to a great extent, in response to what I am calling its inoperative teleology (‘inoperative’ in the sense imported from Nancy’s work on community), through which we are able to catch glimpses of its self-deconstruction.45 Without both moments in this affirmation (domination and resistance), even ‘radical’ political theory remains in danger of repeating and being unable to recognize the violence of totality that we endeavour to overcome.

To be clear, a politics that possesses an inoperative teleology is not the same as a politics that is ateleological. Where we can define teleology loosely in terms of a striving, as that which seeks to account for phenomena via ends or purposes, an ateleological position would focus not on ends or purposes, but rather on maintaining the coherence and harmony of the system itself. In this project, however, the events, ruptures and phenomena which make up our political reality ultimately erupt out of a place of groundlessness, and therefore there is no foundation from which one can strive toward a particular end or purpose, nor is

45 I am referring here to Nancy’s Inoperative Community, where ‘inoperative’ entails an inner ‘unworking.’ I discuss this notion in greater detail later in this chapter as well as in chapter 5. Jean-Luc Nancy, The Inoperative Community, trans. Peter Connor and Lisa Garbus (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).
there a defining principle around which to construct and maintain a coherent system of thought. I reject the descriptor ateleological for this politics precisely because it renders its content immobile; it fixes the political subject in one place and must define itself as a system in terms of inside/outside, the pitfalls of which have been by now well-rehearsed in contemporary theory. I retain the term ‘teleology’ specifically in Kant’s aesthetic usage as a tracing of *purposiveness* precisely because, in this discussion, politics *does* retain a purpose, and that purpose is uncovered in transition, fluidity, movement, supplementarity, and unpredictability. ‘Purposiveness’ provides movement, but does not absolutely establish any one destination as inevitable. An inoperative teleology opens and *keeps* open multiple sites, spaces and possibilities for politics.

This politics thus also resists the traditional notion of contractual obligation as a foundation for political agency, replacing these rigid, unitary subjectivities with sensing, dynamic subjects for whom politics itself becomes a set of sensibilities instead of a closed system. I discuss what is at stake for this political subject at length in chapters 2 through 5 with particular focus on identity, equality, community, and exclusion respectively. Here, I will keep focus on the concept of politics itself, specifically in terms of what I see to be the most marked effect that this ‘war on totality’ has had on our thinking of politics as an object of inquiry: the split between ‘politics’ and ‘the political.’ Though there were certainly other factors involved in triggering this conceptual division, there is a strong case to be made for the notion that it was largely a direct reaction against the enduring popularity of the notion that ‘everything is political.’ More generally, it can be seen as a movement against both the totalizing force of the idea that every action and phenomenon could be subsumed under the umbrella of ‘politics’ (and therefore controlled and determined by it, as Nancy pointed out),

46 For a more in-depth overview of other factors leading up to the split, see James Wiley, *Politics and the Concept of the Political: The Political Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 1-22.
and the notion that our concept of politics itself represented a closed totality, internally consistent and universally applicable, with a specific end toward which the whole of the community would work.

(ii) *Between(), Politics and the Political*

When we ask the question “what is politics?” we no longer automatically begin to list institutions, bureaucratic processes and judicial controls associated with it, because we now know there is much more to it than that. Conversely, though we have made monumental leaps in bringing issues of social justice to the fore in political thought and action by linking the personal and the political, arguing that *everything* is political is equally fraught. Therefore, we must ask about its singularity, that is, what is *specific* to politics, but we must also inquire after both its constitutive ‘outside’ (its ‘others’) as well as those systems and practices that are complicit in concealing this constitution. Put another way, when we ask what politics *is*, we must also ask what politics imagines itself *not* to be, and (perhaps most importantly) by what discursive means we are justified in making this distinction. The canonical standards of ‘Western’ political thought have traditionally been laden with normative, empirical and methodological restrictions in order to gain a more ‘authentic’ understanding of what the ‘truth’ of politics is.\(^{47}\) More recently, with increased attention to interdisciplinarity thanks to the increasing popularity of critical theory, we now habitually consider other dimensions we had previously attempted to exclude, such as the economic, philosophical, historical, sociological, psychological, juridical, geographical, aesthetic, etc.

\(^{47}\) For example, I am referring to liberalism in general, but also approaches undertaken by thinkers such as Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls, as well as the ‘rational choice’ approaches that have so heavily influenced neoliberalism.
Thus, the splitting of politics represents not just a will to a greater understanding of what politics is and does, what it is not and does not do, and the justifications for each, but more importantly, it is representative of a drive toward the resistance of totality in both thought and action.

The focus on what came to be called ‘political difference’ is intimately connected to the crisis in thought that produced it: the ebbing dominance and stability of prominent structuralist models in general (thanks to the work of Derrida, Althusser and Foucault, for example), as well as their inability to live up to the promise to adequately capture and represent as a ‘whole’ the constellation of relations that comprise politics. More and more, we move toward an understanding of politics as part of a larger set of relations that dramatically extend the horizon of what ‘belongs’ to political reality. Specifically, we attempt to embed within any definition of politics a critique of the limits against which those traditional definitions were constructed, as well as an openness to other possibilities that prevents any definition from laying claim to an overarching structure or ultimate foundation.

In the 1980’s and 90’s, thinkers such as Carl Schmitt and Claude Lefort, who are credited with the development of a split notion of politics, were the first to incorporate this notion into their work against a totalizing understanding of politics. Other critical theorists have subsequently taken up this idea, including Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Slavoj Žižek. ‘Politics’ and ‘the political’ are like two sides of one coin, connected yet nevertheless looking out in two different directions. Though each thinker who articulates a split notion of politics has their own nuanced way of conceptualizing the political, we can begin with what these definitions typically agree upon.

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48 Among the most famous structuralist are Ferdinand de Saussure (linguistics), Claude Lévi-Strauss (anthropology), and Jacques Lacan (psychoanalysis – though some identify him as a post-structuralist).
Post-foundational political thought is heavily influenced by Heidegger’s philosophy, specifically in terms of his work on ontology and difference.\(^{49}\) In the context of post-foundational political thought, Oliver Marchart relates this aspect of Heidegger’s thought to questions surrounding the difference between le politique and la politique, or politics and the political.\(^{50}\) Politics refers to the ontic dimension of the social, specifically referencing those institutions that are created to maintain order. These institutions appear insular because of the strict limits upon which they are founded, yet they are also contingent because of the nature of political ontology itself – the political – as that which, in turn, enables and necessitates politics. The political has to do with the establishment of the same social order which ultimately decides what counts as politics and what does not.\(^{51}\) Though politics and the political seem to be fundamentally and necessarily different from one another, neither one is able to exist without reference to the other. This is by now, of course, a rather well-trodden path of inquiry, but Marchart’s contention is that no matter how hard we try to move past this idea of ‘political difference’ toward a newly unified notion of politics, we have yet to reach the point where a single term is adequate.

On one hand, we have politics loosely defined as institutional, bureaucratic, fixed and the site of normalization and order. On the other, the political is generally associated with that ontological dimension of politics that incorporates all of the difference, contingency and critique related to being-toward-another that ‘politics’ tends to exclude. Returning to Schmitt, the political also describes the decision on exception.\(^{52}\) I return to Schmitt’s understanding of

\(^{49}\) It is useful to think of this division along the same lines that Heidegger uses to distinguish the ‘ontic’ from the ‘ontological’ in his concept of ontological difference.

\(^{50}\) Oliver Marchart, Post-Foundational Political Thought (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 35-38.

\(^{52}\) For an excellent article on Schmitt’s understanding of the political and exception, see Sergei Prozorov, “X/Xs: Toward a General Theory of Exception,” Alternatives: Global, Local, Political 30, no. 1 (January – March, 2005): 81-112.
the political and the notion of a politics of exception/exclusion in chapter 5. In this section, it is the form of relation (how one effects the other, the interplays and divergences) between politics and the political that is the focus of my efforts and attention, rather than pinning down a formal definition of either of the two terms. Although I will of course discuss some of the definitions that have been offered, my central focus is the proposition that, as political difference, these terms can only really be understood in terms of their relation to one another. Right away then, we have two terms that are divergent yet mutually dependent; they cannot form a ‘unity’, yet cannot be disassociated. Each side of this relation remains dependent upon the other for its existence in a relation of mutual interdependance.

In *The Political Forms of Modern Society*, Claude Lefort writes:

> The political is revealed not in political activity but in the double movement whereby the mode of institution of society appears and is obscured. It appears in the sense that the process by which society is ordered and unified across its divisions becomes visible. It is obscured in the sense that the locus of politics becomes defined as particular, while the principle which generates the overall configuration is concealed.\(^{53}\)

The institution of this or that political ‘reality’ presupposes and necessitates a certain violence against its own constitution. Any attempt to characterize politics as inside/outside, here and now, there and then, or anything in-between is disorienting; the political is ‘lost’ to us, it is confused with something else or hidden altogether, and as a result, many of us believe that we are rendered unable to speak about what politics *is* in a significant way. Ignoring the dimension of the political merely leaves us with a lack or void at the heart of

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\(^{53}\) Claude Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society*, 11. This argument is similar to Ranciere’s formulation of the ways in which politics interrupts the police order.
politics that we are constantly trying to fill with something *meaningful*. This creates a polemic divide in political theory, with positions falling at various points along the spectrum between the utopian and democratic answers to this problem. The utopian response, closely tied to totalitarianism in particular and fundamentalism more generally, tries to cover over this rift with the creation of a harmonious society through the elimination of difference. The democratic response, on the other hand, attempts to institutionalize this difference by creating and reserving space for political antagonisms. Though this chapter is used to discuss the first response, it is upon this second response that the rest of the project is focused.

The conceptual invention of ‘the political’ as an ontological category that is distinct from the ontic level of practical ‘politics’ has led me to turn my attention toward the *difference between* these two concepts. The ‘difference between’ is, again, not a relation in the sense of something that necessarily forms a *direct* connection between two things; it is not ‘difference’ in the ontic sense. The ‘difference between’ in this context has a force all its own – an aesthetic force, I argue – and this force is precisely what generates the quality of ‘undecidability’ that renders these relations simultaneously possible and impossible. To once again borrow from Kant, we might say that the political *presents* while politics *represents*, and the relation between them is mediated by the imagination. Thus I argue that there is a link between the imagination in the Kantian sense and this notion of the ‘difference between’ insofar as each is intimately bound up in the production of both experience and knowledge. Where they diverge is crucial, however, in that the knowledge and experience produced through the circulation of difference is always already subject to critique due to a post-foundational, post-structural sensibility that drives these theories. Contemporary theorists of difference point to this conceptual difference – difference *as* difference, or Deleuze’s ‘difference-in-itself’ – as having ultimately become the very thing (as sign or symptom)
which points to the absence of a ground, or to cite Deleuze once more, that which “makes us party to a universal ungrounding.” These structures are ungrounded through the destabilizing operation of difference-as-such, but what is widely overlooked or at least under-theorized is what happens in those moment-movements themselves, where knowledge is being dissolved and resolved. This is arguably the spark that ignited the line of critique now known as post-foundationalism.

In what follows, I will briefly sketch the ways in which a small but formidable collection of contemporary theorists distinguish between politics and the political and articulate the relation between them. Very loosely, what we are calling ‘politics’ refers to that dimension of political life that is bound to institutions and institutional rationality. It represents a fractal and ordered thinking that produces those violent and threatening forms of universality and totality of which ‘post-’ theory is extremely critical, but it is also the seat of our everyday experiences of living together. Conversely, what we refer to as ‘the political’ here is distinguished from politics because it is said to resist that kind of instrumental signification, and because we cannot properly ‘experience’ it in the same way that we can experience politics. I have chosen here to characterize the political as also possessing an aesthetic dimension (that is, as a form of experience and/or ‘sense’), as a kind of intervention that is, in the first instance, truly disinterested insofar as it appears unexpectedly in unpredictable ways, and can only ever be decided upon ‘posthumously’ – literally, only after the ‘death’ of that moment – through writing, language or other forms of representation that are themselves determinate. It is useful to think about the relations between ‘reality’ and ‘fiction,’ their mutual interdependence, and the potential for intervention between them in the

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55 I use the term ‘the political’ in this dissertation as a place-holder (for a non-place), acknowledging that ‘the political’ in certain thinkers’ works occasionally goes by a different name.
sense that one is always interrupting the other, confronting, questioning and disputing the limits that define one against the other. Note, however, that I do not mean to imbue one side or the other the status of ‘truth’; instead, we can think about the ways in which something like metaphor works simultaneously to enhance and suppress reality, whereby it is more useful to attempt to understand the mediation itself rather than trying to pin down definitions of the two poles.

The differences between various articulations of the political and the ways in which difference is expressed within them, though interesting, is less important to this analysis than acknowledging that they share certain assumptions. Through having replaced the notion of a positive ground (a grand unifying narrative) with a negative or ‘absent’ one (a ‘founding difference’), theories of society and politics can effectively begin to fight totalization. In other words, we can no longer speak in terms of a problematic double-singularity – a ‘whole’ that is equal to the ‘sum of its parts’ – both because we are no longer able to speak about wholes as such, and because we are effectively prevented from summing in any meaningful (that is, ‘meaning-producing’) way through the operation of difference. Both ‘wholes’ and ‘sums’ belong to the language of positivity, totality, ground and closure. When meaning is thought as being open or contingent, it comes to stand in a radically different relation to other figures of contingency such as truth, history, progress, and of course, the political. Put another way, as Jenny Edkins notes in Poststructuralism and International Relations, the logic of the political is the logic of undecidability, which is at once the foundational moment of hierarchy and its deconstruction.56

This opening of meaning is initially accomplished to a certain extent through the internal division of a unified notion of politics into ‘politics’ and ‘the political,’ though to try

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56 Jenny Edkins, Poststructuralism and International Relations: Bringing the Political Back In (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1999), 83-84.
to preserve that strict division becomes a danger in itself. For example, through the ‘partitioning’ of a unified concept of politics, to borrow a term from Rancière, the closure of meaning (or closure in general) becomes much more difficult, yet this is precisely because Rancière is careful not to construct a system in which that partition is unbreachable.\footnote{See for example, Jacques Rancière, \textit{The Politics of Aesthetics}, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (New York: Continuum, 2004), 12.} Put another way, through a Lacanian interpretation we might say that this difference bears an affinity to \textit{l’Autre} (or ‘big Other’) as a ‘structural cause’ that is only ever present in its \textit{effects}.\footnote{See for example, Jacques Lacan, \textit{The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, Book XI}, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 203-215.} For example, we can only assume that this split exists because of the frequency with which we encounter the limits, failures, gaps or lacks within the totalizing theories and forms of signification that we have inherited. Our collective inability – in the face of a very long history of attempts – of coming up with an ‘ultimate’ definition or a ‘pure’ concept of politics is indicative of the lack of such a concept. Though slightly tautological, it remains an interesting perspective.

We must also be weary of the ways in which these concepts (politics and the political) are ‘temporalized,’ that is, how they relate to and/or are placed in time. Insofar as each of the theorists I engage with in what follows is a thinker of the non-ground – of difference – each is also engaged in the larger project of temporally dislocating these concepts through the repetition of difference as a process of perpetual grounding/ungrounding. I ask, therefore, what possibilities does this temporal dislocation open for political thought from within these ‘moments’ of rupture? It would appear as though something vital is unleashed in the repetition of difference: any attempt to stabilize politics and the political as mutually exclusive or jointly exhaustive concepts is radically inhibited. This difference, characterized as a form of meaning that is perpetually ungrounded, reveals
that a fully articulated encounter with politics must be accompanied by an experience of the political. The political interrupts the spatio-temporal progression of politics, but because any such ‘encounter’ with the political falls outside the realm of teleologic experience, it also guarantees our inevitable reentry into that progression. This is a repetitive cycle whereby the relation varies with each repetition; it is an inoperative teleology.

(iii) Of Parts and Wholes: The Politics of Representation I

composition, association, identity

I use the term ‘relation’ initially here in terms of its definitions as ‘carrying back’ or recounting, as a quality that connects parts as being of the same ‘kind,’ an attitude assumed toward something, the existence or effect of a connection, and perhaps most importantly, ‘the state of being mutually or reciprocally interested.’ I contend that the term relation also signifies the various spatio-temporal distances – or lack thereof – between the particular object-positions we examine here, their connections and disconnections, and ultimately points to something ‘more’ (or less) that relation cannot capture – for example, that which is ‘disinterested.’ Relation, in this latter sense, can’t be figured properly as logos or through a ‘cause and effect’ association. The problematization of relation is also closely tied to various problems associated with structure and identity, as I will discuss below. Beginning with a nod to Plato in setting up the problem of composition as a kind of relation between parts and wholes, I steer our discussion toward the differences between liberal and post-structural political theorists with regard to some of the ways in which Plato’s relational structure has been internalized and reproduced in both the theory and practice of politics, and in some of

59 These definitions are from the Canadian Oxford Dictionary and Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, both on ‘relation.’
the ‘exceptions’ that are produced in its wake. In the following three sections, I also work to figure the split between politics and the political in three different ways: first, as a relation of association; second, as a relation of dissociation; and finally, as rupture.

In expanding on the importance of certain notions of totality and relation to this project, one of the key problems we encounter is that of composition: that is, the relation between a whole and its parts. While this question is certainly an epistemological one, it is also, as it was for Plato, an ontological problem. In his later works, the theory of the Forms provides the link between ontology and the problem of composition that continues to be theorized at length today. Arguably, only the Parthenides could be said to explore the problem of composition as one of its principal themes. Yet it is worth mentioning that composition is a problem that reoccurs in specific passages of many of his works, including the Republic, Protagoras, Parmenides and Timaeus. The problem of composition (the relation between parts and wholes) is directly connected to questions about the one and the many, and thus in my mind, about politics, community, relation and identity. The reason for mentioning Plato’s work on composition is that it offers a way of formulating and addressing a more general problem: namely, our collective obsession with giving an account of the composition of a ‘whole’ out of its parts that preserves the identity of that whole as an ‘individual’ rather than as a collection of parts. Specifically, what we will address here and throughout the project is the democratic composition known as ‘the people,’ that is,

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63 The focus here is upon the ways in which this problem is articulated through specific examples related to politics, democracy and ‘the people,’ but it is worth noting that its scope is certainly not limited to these issues.
structure, “the identity of whose parts is determined only in the context of the whole they compose.”

What we have here are two arguments about the nature of the identity of a whole, which take for granted ‘identity’ as well as the unities of the whole itself and the sum of its parts. What is at stake in this problem is the assumption of this identity, insofar as the whole and the sum are figured as self-identical, and the assumption that there is a relation of identity that exists between them. I ask you now to make the leap into some of the ways in which this assumption and the relational structures that it produces are played out in politics.

In drawing upon ‘representation’ in all of its political and aesthetic connotations, I will discuss some of the ways in which Plato’s relational structure is continually (re)presented and (re)inscribed in political theory and praxis. The theorists from whom I draw my examples in this section include Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Hannah Arendt and Carl Schmitt.

Though this collection represents a small sample, I maintain that it serves to illustrate the school of liberal thought that triggered the shift that opened the field of inquiry in political thought to more radical post-structural, post-foundational and deconstructive theories.

Specifically here, I focus on the fact that although each of the thinkers in these three sections is approaching similar questions about intersubjectivity and what it means to belong to a political community, this first group are what I will call ‘theorists of association and agreement,’ who tend to see political association through the lens of inclusion.

As an example of the scope and endurance of the problem of the identity of a whole, we will begin with two simple perspectives. Let us begin with two theses: first, that a whole is equal to the sum of its parts; and second, that a whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

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64 Harte, Plato, 3. She does not address politics or democracy here, but her description of the alternative that Plato constructs to counter the notion that the relation of many parts to one whole (composition) is identity, or the relation of a thing to itself.
To cite a brief example of the first thesis, in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke offers a series of Maxims about certain knowledge, one being that “the whole is equal to all its parts taken together.” The real issue with this thesis is that it logically contradicts itself through the language of ‘summing’ or ‘taking together.’ Rather than describing the relationship between a whole and its many parts as such as it sets out to do, it creates instead two self-present singular entities that are identical, but nevertheless remain distinct: the whole itself and the ‘sum of its parts.’ We can look again to the example of democracy: on the one hand, we have the aggregation or fusion of parts (citizens, with rights, ideals, goals, sentiments, etc. in common) into ‘the people,’ who, when taken together, form the governing body; on the other, we have the concept of the whole (the governing body as such, a democracy, a state, a government etc.) that even when equated with the ‘sum of its parts,’ seems to retain its singularity.

In the second thesis, where a whole is greater than the sum of its parts, we encounter a more radical problem. In addition to the problem of the ‘sum,’ we must also address the issue of what ‘greater than’ implies. If this surplus were yet another part within this structure, then it would have to be either part of that sum or part of another one (and thus part of another whole within a larger structure). We can take Gestalt psychology or even Foucault’s notion of discourse to be good examples of this model of composition. The most interesting question that is raised through thinking about composition in this second way, however, is whether or not ‘structure-independent objects’ exist that can affect those structures from without somehow. Plato, like any good structuralist, would answer ‘no.’ Plato’s model of composition, along with the kind of ontology it suggests, privileges structures among its

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66 This phenomenon is discussed at length by Foucault in his work on discourse.
fundamental ordering principles. To his credit, he does not think of structures as mutually exclusive or jointly exhaustive entities (e.g., the idea of ‘structures within structures’ in the *Timaeus*), but even this more abstract thinking continues to resist the possibility that the parts of these structures can be identified ‘outside’ the context of the structures to which they belong.\(^67\) Turning this discussion over to politics, I will begin by examining a few of the ways in which this relation plays out in classical liberal thought.

Discourses of nationalism, patriotism, citizenship, contract, pluralism, liberalism, democracy, human rights and social justice rely upon fundamental assumptions about the existence of a political community. For example, even the so-called ‘anti-communal’ versions of liberalism take for granted the existence of a polity whose ‘essence’ supersedes the bonds of blood, class, religion and ethnicity to become the condition of possibility for an ‘impartial’ but effective government, equally applicable and accountable laws, and a publicly universalizable code of ethics.\(^68\) Democratic theory also posits these bonds of trust and shared sympathy, but it relies heavily on the capacity of a group of individuals to act as a collective ‘people’ that takes its socio-political obligations seriously. Discussions about human rights (or social justice more broadly) assume both of these dimensions and add a third: the necessity of a relatively ‘closed’ political community that is built upon its own communal resources and a strong sense of solidarity. Each of these examples, at some point, comes to rely upon a particular conception of membership or some other form of social closure.

Though each of these examples articulates a different expression of political community, they are connected, mutually supportive, and each is founded upon and works to

\(^67\) For a discussion of ‘structures within structures’ in the *Timaeus*, see Harte, pp. 212-266. We will return to this problem in the final section and explore some theories that radically oppose Plato’s conclusion about the primacy of structure and the limiting relations between parts and wholes.

\(^68\) For example, communitarians accuse liberalism of creating antagonism through its strict drawing of boundaries between individuals (re: freedom, for example).
reinforce a politics of identity. What we see through these examples are not distinct political agendas, but instead variations on the concept of the liberal-democratic model of community that is as much tied to the form of the state (the whole) as it is to the identity of the sum of its parts (citizens, laws, ethics, etc.), and moreover, to the equation of the two. This is not a phenomenon that is unique to the examples cited above. This model, along with the practice of summation (in each of the senses of the word), has been the paradigm for political theory and praxis from Plato through Marx and beyond. I do not believe it to be unreasonable to argue that ‘summing’ (alongside ‘judgment’ and ‘naming’) ought to count among the ranks of ‘penultimate’ political acts in this tradition, imposed upon each collection of parts from within and from without, in both the first and last instances. Although the identity of each sum will vary depending on the equation – be it democratic, hegemonic, totalitarian, socialist or otherwise – and the infinite possible variations thereof, this identity will nevertheless come to be equated to the identity of the whole, in this case, an ideology or the State. I limit the focus of the following examples to liberal-democratic theory here because of the way in which the concept of a political community is developed out of a series of agreements (i.e., contracts), because of its influence on the discourse of ‘identity politics,’ and because it figures prominently in the contemporary critiques of politics, community, composition and structure.

In the liberal-democratic tradition, the mere existence of a bureaucratic state is not adequate to create a sense of political legitimacy; we additionally insist upon the condition that it be our state, and that its institutions both represent and belong to ‘the people,’ in whichever form that assemblage takes. This is not unique to liberal-democratic theory, of course, since the Marxist tradition demands a similar connection between collective identity and popular power. What is unique to liberal-democratic theory, however, is the further
condition that the more democratic the state is to be, the greater the urgency for the people to acquire a bond of unity over and above that presented by (but not in defiance of) common subjection. In *Leviathan*, for example, Hobbes acknowledged the necessity of providing a sense of unity through that figure, the embodiment of ‘every man,’ as a solution to the otherwise isolated and mutually hostile existence in the state of nature.\(^6^9\) Locke, in the second of his *Two Treatises of Government*, also proposed a unifying structure through the ‘law of nature.’\(^7^0\) Through his work to balance Aquinas and Hobbes, Locke establishes natural law as something that both precedes and complements the positive law that is associated with political community or society.\(^7^1\) Our ‘natural’ rights to life, liberty and property cannot be overwritten or infringed upon by government or by others, unless one has violated the right of another. Where for Hobbes, our main interest in forming a base community lies in the avoidance of violent death at the hands of another (because of a negative view of competition), Locke’s formulation writes competition into its most basic tenets as something both positive and desirable.

Perhaps one feature that they share, however, is that there is no collective ‘people’ to whom either the Leviathan or ‘the individual’ can or must be answerable. It is precisely here that we can locate perhaps the last vestige of the tradition out of which Hobbes and Locke emerge. In any formally hierarchical government, even one formed around the carefully laid out rules described by Machiavelli in *The Prince*, the masses are only figured as a ‘collective body’ insofar as they need to be protected from themselves, from external threats, and from

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anything that could provoke revolution. For both Hobbes and Locke, the role of politics (as the entrance into and maintenance of a contract) retains a trace of this logic in the sense that the contract’s function, in its most basic sense, is still that of controlling the population.

Although human beings now had natural rights and made a ‘choice’ to limit them, sovereignty continued to belong on the side of the governing body and even to the contract itself (as a sustained ‘moment’ of surrender). If the group living together under this contract were itself also to be sovereign, however, then it would need (as Rousseau saw) a mutual or collective identity.

Rousseau’s concept of the General Will, as outlined in The Social Contract, brings together at least three crucial components in order to work toward overcoming the manifold problems associated with tyrannical and/or hierarchical forms of government. In effect, it emphasizes and unites the roles of participation over subjection (through democracy), equality over privilege or patronage (under and before the law), and justice (by elevating the ‘common good’ above individual interest). This is not to say, of course, that Rousseau’s work effectively or finally resolved all of the issues surrounding representation, equality, justice, sovereignty, freedom or participation that are always at the forefront of politics. Rousseau himself (not unlike Marx) didn’t believe that these ideals would be attainable in anything as large as a city-state because of the level of agreement or unity that would be

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required of the citizens.\textsuperscript{75} He certainly would not have expected that in the two hundred years since his death, large States have come to bear some relation to his ideal.\textsuperscript{76}

What represents a marked departure from Rousseau’s ideal is the way in which the Western European and Anglo-American traditions have managed to translate the idea of ‘the people’ into the idea of ‘the nation.’\textsuperscript{77} The significance of this conversion is that it eliminates the ‘active’ side of contractualism on both ends: on the one hand, the lawgiver no longer has to forge a collective entity; on the other, the people no longer have to cultivate the same levels of public spirit or agreement. Unlike ‘the people,’ it could be assumed that the nation already existed as a historic entity. Rather than having to work toward producing the common good, justice, equality and sovereignty through practice, these ideals are swept up into the discourse of the nation and taken for granted as given. In a sense, this resembles the process of what Jacques Rancière refers to as “the purification of politics.”\textsuperscript{78} Rancière is critical of the idea that the political can be purified by purging from it any consideration of the domestic and social realms, thereby effectively reducing what is ‘properly political’ to the state.\textsuperscript{79} ‘The people,’ as a sovereign political body, is effectively neutralized through this discursive slight-of-hand.

If we recast Rousseau’s concept of ‘the people’ in the terms of our discussion on composition, the kind of community that is formed is not simply a ‘conglomeration’ of lives and wills, as was the case with Hobbes’ Leviathan, for example.\textsuperscript{80} In contrast, having placed

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid. 84-89, 131-138.
\textsuperscript{76} One potential reason for this unexpected large-scale success would be economic growth, which at least initially has the effect of quieting conflicts of interest.
\textsuperscript{77} For further reading, see William Boelhower, “‘We the People’: Shifting Forms of Sovereignty,” in American Literary History 9, no. 2 (Summer, 1997): 364-379; and Sofia Näsström, “The Legitimacy of the People,” in Political Theory 35, no. 5 (October, 2007): 624-658.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., T1, s2.
\textsuperscript{80} If we could assign a formula to Hobbes’ and Locke’s accounts, it might look something like this: $W = P, P, P, P, P, P, P, P, P,...$ (etc.). Neither is properly a ‘summing’.

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sovereignty in the hands of the people and adorned the body politic with a collective identity of its own, Rousseau created a distinct and singular entity with a life and a will of its own. Rather than describing the relationship between a whole and its many parts *as such* (as is perhaps most prominent in Locke’s thought), it creates instead two self-present singular entities that are identical, but nevertheless remain distinct (the people as a whole, and the people as the sum of its parts).

Each of these thinkers, I argue, ultimately speaks the language of ‘closure’ or *enclosure* through the rhetoric of the contract in order to create a society that is stable, secure and secular. I argue here that Rousseau’s theory, however, is the most radical because he effectively creates not one, but two sovereign bodies (the people, government) by designating two non-concentric, self-grounding, equal spheres (the social, the political). Even Rousseau seems to be engaged in describing within politics a rudimentary version of what we today might cast as its ‘ontological’ and ‘ontic’ dimensions. I am certainly not proposing that Rousseau had in some way pre-empted certain post-modern theories of political difference. For starters, the ‘split’ (if it exists) in Rousseau’s work is still grounded in a positivity insofar as these differences are constructed through, and deeply rooted in, identity. It is simply worth noting that his creation of a ‘sovereign social body’ that is no longer sublated by politics (as government), through which the sphere of politics is split and its scope doubled, continues to resonate so strongly even now.

Although this is only one of several ways in which Rousseau’s thought has had a profound influence on political theory in reference to the creation of political community, it is indicative of the many reasons why his thought continues to enjoy careful attention in

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81 I am still unsure about this argument! But I will stand by it for now. This ontic/ontological distinction is borrowed from Heidegger’s concept of ‘ontological difference.’

82 Laclau’s work is an excellent example of this, but these problems are also taken up by thinkers as diverse as Schmitt, Arendt, Lefort, Derrida, Nancy, Lacoue-Labarthe, Badiou, Rancière and others, as we will see.
contemporary theory. Badiou, for example, nominates Rousseau as an ‘event’ in *Being and Event*. He makes this designation for a number of reasons, but most notably for what Badiou terms the event of the social contract, the concept of the General Will (insofar as it is ‘generic’) and the articulation of a notion of ‘collective humanity’ (however problematic). But Badiou also warns us that the strong desire for unity and egalitarianism that inspired the social contract will inevitably be corrupted. According to Badiou, there is an “inherent and inevitable vice which relentlessly tends to destroy the body politic from the moment of its birth.” This point – or warning – echoes the tone of other critiques aimed at political systems that are structured by a totalizing unitarian impulse. In *The Critique of Dialectical Reason*, for example, Sartre argues that there is a kind of inevitable ‘falling-off’ or failure of the demands driving every collective project and every revolution. If this is the case, then the question here is, why? I offer that part of the problem is related to the underlying assumptions driving these collective projects. I argue that it is the relational assumptions about politics, identity and agreement upon which we base these projects that are fundamentally problematic.

Although the term didn’t begin to be used in popular terminology until around the 1970’s, one could argue that ‘identity politics’ slowly developed out of a tradition of political theory and praxis that was preoccupied with the politics of recognition and with egalitarianism, which both stem from a classically liberal understanding of democracy as mass-individualism. Since then, the responsibility to promote equality and protect rights was supposed to be shared between government and citizens, but the vast majority of these

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84 Ibid., 345.
*This argument is present in some form throughout much of the text in his critique of ‘unity’ in its dialectical context.*
movements have become more individualistic rather than more broadly egalitarian. Moreover, the egalitarian impulse that was characteristic of earlier liberal-democratic or republican political projects is itself also part of the problem. For example, membership within the ‘community of equals’ was exclusive to heterosexual white male adults. The humanist politics of thinkers such as Arendt, who called for inclusion on the basis of the shared ‘interest’ (inter esse) of human kind, a shared common sense (a sensus communis not unlike Kant’s), and a shared public space that was available to everyone and anyone who perceived it was also rejected, precisely because of the degree to which it upholds the notion of a ‘common interest.’

Egalitarian, humanist and even democratic theories appeal to varying degrees of commonality that attempt to erode differences, or at least to grant inclusion ‘in spite of’ those differences. What formally comes to be called identity politics, at the other end of the spectrum, rejects this model in favor of one in which the demand for recognition is grounded in and maintained through an appeal to difference as the basis and limit of (actual and possible) experience and self-determination. In other words, on one hand, we have a group of theories that promote a sort of universalism that relies too heavily on agreement; on the other, a group of theories that, in its reliance on a set of grounding differences, is necessarily exclusionary.

My central concern with our currently understanding of identity is the way in which identity claims are, for the most part, structured through this constitutive exclusion. In his book Identity/Difference for example, William Connolly explains his take on this founding exclusion:

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…the maintenance of one identity (or field of identities) involves the conversion of some differences into otherness, into evil, or one of its numerous surrogates. Identity requires differences in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty.\footnote{William Connolly, \textit{Identity/Difference} (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), 64.}

The problem, then, is that identities which appear to inherently or naturally belong to an individual or group are in fact defined through their opposition to an other. Claiming this kind of identity as belonging authentically to an individual or group only works to reinforce the dependence of that individual or group on the negative reification of this other. The outcome of this kind of relation, then, rather than helping that group to reject an oppressive hierarchy, has instead served to reinforce or create one. Identity politics therefore effectively (though perhaps unintentionally) brings to light another interesting problem for relation, namely through decisions about who and what ‘counts’ politically, or the way in which the concept of the political is grounded. We can extract from the rhetoric of identity politics two parallel yet contradictory interpretations of this problem in what could initially be called ‘the politics of association’ and ‘the politics of dislocation.’ Although association and a form of ‘positive’ dislocation are taken up simultaneously through identity politics in the establishment and circulation of a particular political identity through which to engage in political action, I trace the origins of each of these models separately through the examples of Hannah Arendt and Carl Schmitt respectively.

A politics of association can be characterized by the theories we had been examining previously, but is perhaps best expressed in the work of Hannah Arendt.\footnote{Arendt deals largely with three types of political association in her work: the polis (\textit{The Human Condition}); the more modern republic (\textit{On Revolution}); and the nation-state (\textit{The Origins of Totalitarianism}). One could also characterize the work of other neo-Kantians such as Habermas in terms of the politics of association. Thinkers such as Antonio Gramsci, on the other hand, are highly critical of this notion.} By ‘association,’ I
am not only referring to her emphasis upon the existence of the *common*, since all politics is collective in some respect, but to also to the associative foundation upon which it is established. This is what ultimately distinguishes her thought from that of Rousseau, for example. Arendt is highly critical of any political foundation that requires a ‘retreat from the self’ in order to form a collective while being equally critical of the notion of the political collective being established on the basis of privilege. Association, then, can be neither totalizing nor hierarchical. 89 While Arendt does not engage in splitting the concept of politics in the same way that it is split in contemporary theory (into politics and the political), as a Heideggarian, she is deeply concerned with the idea that there are forms of ‘authentic’ and ‘inauthentic’ politics, or ‘political’ and ‘apolitical’ politics. 90 This split implies that her answer to our question of what counts as politics is to be found in her search for what is political *about* politics – that is, a pure or authentic understanding of politics. For example, what is ‘authentically political’ must be protected against its potential sublation into the social, economic, bureaucratic, discursive forms of instrumental rationality; what must be preserved is the autonomy of the associative or ‘communal moment’ through which the concept of an authentic politics is grounded. 91 At a glance, there is a problem here to which we will return: though for Arendt, association itself can be neither totalizing nor hierarchical, it would seem that the notion of ‘authentic’ politics implies its occupation of an elevated position within a hierarchy. For the time being, I will leave this problem here.

Turning from Arendt’s insistence on the ‘associative moment,’ Carl Schmitt, by contrast, proposes a concept of the political that is grounded in the ‘disruptive moment,’ a fundamental dislocation. The ground upon which Schmitt constructs his political collective

91 Rancière is highly critical of this notion of ‘pure’ politics. See especially “Ten Theses” T1 s2.
has also played a constitutive role in the invention of identity politics, and has had a profound influence upon contemporary theories of radical democracy. Where Arendt offers that one’s political identity is established, defined and maintained through certain associations, Schmitt adds that it can also be defined through our relations to certain antagonisms. In *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt sets up a simple antagonism between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ through which he establishes the political collective.\(^92\) Standing almost in direct opposition to Arendt’s thesis, Schmitt grounds the political in a form of dissociation, specifically in the distinction between friend and enemy.\(^93\) Like Arendt, Schmitt holds the autonomy of the political domain above all other domains and their correlative distinctions (economic, ethical, social, etc), and does so by describing the political domain as “inherently objective” and “autonomous,” and as the “strongest and most intense of the distinctions.”\(^94\) Like Arendt, Schmitt also engages in a conceptual splitting of politics, yet in his understanding each side is defined through an internal antagonism in relation to the larger distinction between being located ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ the sphere of governability.\(^95\)

Sketched roughly, Schmitt’s understanding of the political would refer to the institution of Statehood and thus to the ‘outside.’ The political is therefore more concerned with what happens between states, an externalized politics that is grounded in the friend/enemy distinction. Internal politics, on the other hand, would resemble something of a

\(^92\) Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. G. Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). This inside/outside distinction is significant throughout this project, and is discussed explicitly and at length in chapter 5.

\(^93\) Ibid. 26.

\(^94\) Ibid. 27. My emphasis.

\(^95\) Though I adhere to the importance of the associative/dissociative moment in understanding politics, I ultimately reject Arendt’s and Schmitt’s formulations in favour of a post-foundational approach which refuses the notion of a final ground.
precursor to what Rancière terms the ‘police order.’ This aspect of politics is concerned with the ‘internal’ antagonisms of the social, bureaucratic, institutional and moral spheres. Because of the tendency of internal antagonisms to occasionally reach the outside, and the tendency for the external friend/enemy distinction to be carried back into the sphere of politics, these distinctions are not absolute. Seen through a contemporary lens, the biggest criticism of Schmitt’s theory is related to its heavy reliance upon the predominance of the State, and the extent to which these relational structures are universalized. Antagonism, for example, is universalized as a principle that is both internal and external to (or independent of) the political collective, thus making the population vulnerable to antagonism from the State. Moreover, in casting the political domain as objective, his formulation leaves the entire system open to the development and proliferation of totalitarian ideologies. These are the main issues that are taken up, critiqued, and in some cases reworked by thinkers such as Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe and Slavoj Zizek. Other critics, most notably Derrida and Rancière, take issue with Schmitt’s formulation of the political in terms of the distinction between ‘inside’ and ‘outside,’ a notion that remained one of the fundamental assumptions of political ontology for decades following its publication.

Another resonant element in Schmitt’s work is his infamous designation of the ‘state of exception.’ In the opening lines of Political Theology, Schmitt writes, “the sovereign is he

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96 Rancière, “‘Ten Theses,” T6, s19. The importance of the distinction between Rancière’s ‘politics’ and ‘police order’ is important throughout his work. See especially Disagreement, On the Shores of Politics and The Politics of Aesthetics. We will discuss this distinction in detail later in the chapter.
who decides on the exception.” This decision, crudely sketched, is the decision to temporarily step ‘outside’ of or suspend the rule of law for the sake of public interest and/or security. The most obvious example of a situation in which this decision would be made is war. What I want to briefly point to with this second example of dislocation in Schmitt’s work, however, is the more subversive influence of this notion of decision, along with the notion of ‘exception’ as that which falls outside of the law. In a contemporary context, this occurs both theoretically and practically. The decision/exception relation plays out in a number of ways with varying consequences, and the examples that I have selected below are no where near exhaustive. I have chosen them in part because they embody the logic of exception, but also because they together introduce an important concept that is one of the key theoretical objects of this project: what Rancière terms the “part that has no part,” the “collection of the unaccounted for.” This theme of exclusion features prominently in this project, specifically in terms of the notion that exclusion is a necessary precursor to (comm)unity. In the following section, I look at some of the ways in which this constitutive exclusion is figured as a condition of possibility for political community, using examples found in the work of Agamben, Spivak, Bauman and Lyotard.

(iv) Of Parts and Holes: The Politics of Representation II

community, exclusion, rupture

In Disagreement, Rancière examines Aristotle’s political philosophy in order to shed light on one of the deeper connections between aesthetics and politics in the function that the ‘partitioning of the sensible’ (or that which defines what is included and excluded) plays in

the establishment of a community. In Aristotle’s work on political community, Rancière uncovers a partitioning of the sensible in a distinction between two kinds of sense experience: first, *pathos*, which merely allows us to sense pleasure and pain; and second, *logos*, which imbues us with the power to perceive justice and injustice. Here, our capacities to sense, express and even judge are the conditions of possibility for the institution of a political community, emerging alongside a set of limits regarding who will and will not ‘partake’ of that community. *Logos*, therefore, is a prerequisite for the creation of and entry into a political community, and, according to Rancière, marks the set of relations that make this community political in the first place. The emergence of political communities that are founded upon *logos* also exemplifies our propensity to envision the world as being composed of proper ‘parts’ with proper (that is, *just*) relations between them. As a side note, we also tend to see ourselves this way in how our identities are constructed. We are left with what I believe to be a very important question here: what can we make of those parts deemed to be *improper*? In this section, I turn to Giorgio Agamben, Gayatri Spivak, Zygmunt Bauman, and Jean-François Lyotard – a group I refer to as the ‘theorists of dislocation’ – who tend to focus on the tension between association and exclusion as a constitutive force in politics and sociality. This is important for me to do here, as I argue that this kind of thinking is formative of the ‘politics of exclusion’ which I continue to develop at length in chapter 5. Before we dive into the examples I have chosen, I will briefly discuss the extent to which ‘improper parts’ and the supervening ‘improper relations’ can register sensibly at all.

For the political community to become something more than a story that is told in classical liberal thought, the equality upon which it is founded must be radically different.

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102 The following paragraph anticipates some key points from the following chapters, which I continue to develop at length.
from the forms of economic and juridical equivalence, as well as notions of the common
good that have traditionally been used as placeholders for equality.\textsuperscript{103} I argue that even the \textit{a priori} categories of freedom and justice will not suffice, as I argue in chapters 3 and 4. The reason that Rancière turns to classical political philosophy in his work is to argue that it reveals that politics \textit{is not} concerned with connections between individuals, nor is it concerned with the relation between the individual and the community: instead, “politics arises from a count of community ‘parts,’ which is always a false count, a double count, or a miscount.”\textsuperscript{104} This “fundamental miscount,” as he calls it, is exposed in the first instance when political freedom is revealed to be merely the \textit{appearance} of freedom, an empty property that serves mainly to limit equality to its “arithmetical” form in which wealth is “immediately identical with domination.”\textsuperscript{105} This freedom, which is supposedly ‘proper’ to the demos, can only be defined in the negative. Thus, it comes as little surprise when, in Rancière’s second example of miscount, he reveals that the demos itself is also negatively defined as a \textit{lack} (of wealth, of virtue), an “undifferentiated mass” which is nevertheless said to be free \textit{like} the rest.\textsuperscript{106} Finally, because this negative freedom is held up by the masses as being a virtue held in common by all, a sense of equality is fostered among the masses, which allows them to “identify with the whole of community through homonymy.”\textsuperscript{107} This sense of the “equality of anyone at all with anyone else” becomes manifest only through what Rancière identifies as the fundamental ‘wrong,’ that is, this miscount that is constitutive of politics itself.\textsuperscript{108} It is a paradoxical equality, then, as it only comes to exist by way of that which denies it. Because of this reliance on \textit{exclusion}, community formation must therefore

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid, 7.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid, 6.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid, 8.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid, 8.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid, 9.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid, 15.
\end{flushleft}
always also involve the suppression of that which underpins (and threatens) each and every claim to a shared identity: the part with no part.

Turning to *Homo Sacer*, Agamben illuminates the connections between this obscure figure of Roman law, Aristotle’s philosophical distinction between *zoe* (‘bare life,’ or nature) and *bios* (‘qualified life,’ or culture), and Schmitt’s ‘state of exception.’ *Homo sacer* is translated as ‘sacred man.’ This term applies to a person “whom the people have judged on account of a crime,” and who, as a result of this judgment, can be killed by anyone without penalty but cannot be sacrificed.109 Though not formally exiled, he is effectively banned from society and no longer enjoys the protection of the law, even though he appears to retain a tie to the law through the caveat that he may not be sacrificed. In contrast to Schmitt’s insistence that the state of emergency is necessarily included under the rule of law, however, Agamben argues precisely the opposite – this notion of the ‘sacred man’ demonstrates that some forms of life cannot be subsumed under the rule of law. He creates the notion of the ‘zone of indistinction’ in order to characterize the position of *homo sacer* in terms of a ‘neither/nor’ (as opposed to the ‘either/or’ that we could attribute to the rule of law): *homo sacer* is neither human nor divine, and exists in a zone between *zoe* and *bios*.110 The sovereign act of the ‘ban’ effectively places him at the “threshold of indistinction,” between inclusion and exclusion, so that he “dwells paradoxically within both while belonging to neither.”111 He is, in the most literal sense, *dis-located*.

I argue that these two objects of analysis – represented thus far by ‘the part with no part’ or *homo sacer* and the ‘zone of indistinction’ – do not reside exclusively in Agamben’s work, but are instead two among many other representations of a shared awareness in

110 Ibid. 8.
111 Ibid. 105.
contemporary theory of the importance of exclusion in political thought. I see very similar sensibilities circulating in the figures of Spivak’s “subaltern,” Bauman’s “stranger,” and Lyotard’s concept of the “differend.” In Spivak’s essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” for example, she uses the term ‘subaltern’ in the Gramscian sense of designating someone who is economically dispossessed. Spivak, however, adds a discursive dimension to the concept, namely that of being rendered ‘unable to speak,’ somewhat paradoxically, through the very discourse that purports to represent their particular interests, and a political dimension insofar as her subaltern is one who has little or no access to the social, one who is an ‘effect’ of politics rather than an agent.\textsuperscript{112} There are at least three ways in which the subaltern is continuously re-inscribed into her subordinate position in society. First, she is marginalized through the existence of the subaltern position itself (the result of a particular configuration of social/economic/political relations); second, she is marginalized through the discourse of post-colonial studies purporting to speak for her; and third, she is marginalized at the level of identity, where individual and collective identities are constructed around this particular understanding of subordinance.\textsuperscript{113} Although this position is not the direct result of a ‘sovereign ban,’ the subaltern can certainly be said to exist in a ‘zone of indistinction’ in the sense that she is subject to the law (and to the discourse of post-coloniality) but denied access to it.

Bauman’s ‘stranger’ is likewise a composite figure, combining elements from Simmel (the stranger as a social phenomenon) and Derrida (through its ‘undecidable’ character).\textsuperscript{114} This stranger is defined through her particular social position in contrast to what Bauman later comes to refer to as the ‘solid’: fixed structures such as universals, norms,

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
order, Truth, etc.\textsuperscript{115} The stranger is an interesting figure precisely because of her ‘undecidable’ nature in this respect. On the one hand, the ‘exotic’ or unusual qualities of the stranger are exciting in their socially accepted forms – generally aesthetic or gastro-intestinal – and therefore the stranger’s “strangerhood” is acceptable to a certain degree.\textsuperscript{116} On the other hand, however, the stranger is also figured as an object of fear and suspicion because of that same quality of ‘strangeness’ or unfamiliarity. Schmitt’s friend/enemy distinction no longer applies here because the stranger is both; it is this quality of ‘strangerhood’ that makes the stranger both enticingly exotic \textit{and} dangerously impossible to control or properly order. She is conspicuous, yet remains unknowable. One of Bauman’s own examples of the stranger is the figure of the Jew.\textsuperscript{117} Although Agamben’s example of the camp may seem fitting here, we cannot ignore the fact that the ‘Jew-as-stranger’ has a history that pre-dates WWII by well over a thousand years. The stranger, like the subaltern, exists in a zone of indistinction, in this case, precisely because of the undecidable quality of her strangerhood.

Finally, using the example of the “differend” in relation to the figure of the victim, I argue that Lyotard identifies another ‘zone of indistinction’ through his characterization of the differend as a linguistic double-bind.\textsuperscript{118} A differend emerges out of an irresolvable conflict between two parties. The conflict is irresolvable because there is no rule or principle of judgment that applies equally to both parties. Lyotard is careful to point out that, “one side’s legitimacy does not imply the other’s lack of legitimacy.”\textsuperscript{119} The problem arises out of the fact that the two parties are not subject to a single rule of judgment.\textsuperscript{120} A victim, according to Lyotard, is not simply someone who has been wronged: the real injustice or violence

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{116} Bauman, \textit{Modernity and Ambivalence}, 62, 75.  \\
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid, 31.  \\
\textsuperscript{118} Jean François Lyotard, \textit{The Differend}, trans. G. Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).  \\
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid, \textit{Preface}, xi.  \\
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid, \textit{Preface}, xi.
\end{flushleft}
occurs when that victim is denied the power to present that wrong. The victim is silenced (and thus truly wronged) when the ‘rules’ of the particular discourse through which she is judged are different from the rules of the discourse according to which she herself judges.\textsuperscript{121}

Put another way, the victim’s wrong cannot be translated into the discourse by which it is being judged; therefore, s/he is prevented from presenting that wrong as a wrong within that particular discourse.\textsuperscript{122}

In this case, a discourse is presented as a closed totality (as discourses are so often imagined); thus anything that falls outside of its parameters is excluded from its ‘truth,’ and thus becomes indistinct.

There is one more of Agamben’s texts where he writes about the ‘modern’ zone of indistinction to which I will draw attention here. In \textit{Means Without End}, Agamben explains that this modern zone of indistinction cuts through both the political and the subject. For example, it is through this zone that the ‘subject’ becomes simultaneously subject and object, or subject and subjected. The ‘people’ are both legislators and subject to legislation, or sovereign and subject to the sovereign power of the state.\textsuperscript{123} Moreover, as we have seen through the above examples, what is really of crucial importance here is not Agamben, or even the terms through which he articulates his theory. It is the relation that he points to through his formulation of the ‘zone of indistinction’ that is significant. Each of these examples, through their existence as exception, as ‘other,’ and as both subject and object of an exclusion, poses a strong challenge to the notion of a unified, self-identical subjectivity

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid. \textit{Preface}, xi.
\textsuperscript{122} Rancière also deals with this problem by positing politics as the field in which to stage a ‘wrong,’ proposing that this victim can present her wrong through the ‘crossing of identities.’ I discuss Rancière’s approach in depth in Chapter 5 in the section titled “Heterology and the Crossing of Identities.”
that exists (ontologically or actually) prior to any form of socialization or politics.\(^{124}\) As we will fully come to see in chapter 5, even the most marginal subject is inseparable from its conditions of possibility, even if those conditions of possibility come in the form of a paradoxical, undecidable and ‘indistinct’ form of inclusionary exclusion. It is precisely this kind of relation upon which the perspectives taken on politics in the remainder of this project are built. In *The Politics of Aesthetics*, for example, Rancière writes that “politics is aesthetics in that it makes visible what had been excluded from a perceptual field, and that it makes audible what had been inaudible.”\(^{125}\) But it is not merely by virtue of this exclusion that the exception finds its power; it is rather through its ability to re-enter the system from which it was excluded at any given moment that it finds its radical potential.

**(v) (Dis)locating the Political: rupture and displacement**

The fundamental dislocation of a self-present subject, of politics and the political, of the collective and the individual, of structure and meaning, or of any particular compositional equation to which I have been pointing is what has been driving contemporary (predominantly French) theory on the question of politics.\(^{126}\) We can be reasonably sure that we will have done away with the language of ‘parts,’ ‘sums’ and ‘wholes’ as distinct entities that compose and comprise the very terms that ground relation in the first place, and can now acknowledge that these terms themselves are relational, being defined in relation to their own and the others’ limits, each being subject to its own particular conditions of possibility. In

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\(^{124}\) I discuss this further in chapters 3 and 5.


\(^{126}\) I am referring to the work of thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Rancière, Alain Badiou, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.
this section, I move from the more restrained notions of ‘interruption’ and ‘disruption’ toward the more forceful notion of ‘rupture’ portrayed as both the herald and condition of politics. The group of thinkers I engage here includes Rancière, Badiou, Nancy, Lacoue-Labarthe and Derrida, and I lump them together here as ‘thinkers of rupture.’ ¹²⁷ I begin this section with the argument that for each of the thinkers I look at here, in whichever way this rupture is figured, it is precisely the moment and activity of rupture that is to a great extent what is so significant about their work on politics, our understandings of the relations between politics and the political, and more generally in terms of resisting totality. The moment of rupture is the political moment, marking the emergence and actualization (however temporary) of our most highly prized political values, including freedom, equality and cooperation.¹²⁸ In this respect, this particular group of thinkers thus becomes the focus of the remainder of this project in building a politics of exclusion and its potential for resistance.

This deployment of rupture in contemporary theory has become such a necessity in understanding politics today. Whether figured as ‘ungrounding,’ undecidability, unworking, antagonistic, parasitic, disruptive or otherwise, these diverse figures of radical displacement all lead us toward a fundamental displacement of the primacy of politics (the ontic side) that is taking place in critical political thought.¹²⁹ Each of these thinkers, in his own way, brings the play of political difference to the fore and rallies against the tendency of any unified

¹²⁷ There are, of course, a number of other thinkers who could be added here, including (but not limited to) Lacan, Merleau-Ponty, Agamben, Žižek, Marx, Hegel, Benjamin, Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse… I have limited my choices to thinkers who I see engaging the ‘split politics’ problem who also incorporate rupture as a necessary and central part of that relation. *The one exception would be Derrida, but I include him as perhaps the quintessential 20th century philosopher of rupture, especially through aporia and the deconstruction of the ‘inside/outside’ relation, which I believe provides the framework for this entire discussion. For excellent further reading on rupture through the lenses of politics, philosophy and aesthetics, please see Paul Eisenstein and Todd McGowan, Rupture: On the Emergence of the Political (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2012).
¹²⁸ I delve at length into these concepts in chapters 3 and 4.
¹²⁹ For example, post-structuralists and post-foundationalists work to displace structure and ground respectively (though they are certainly related) in order to trouble the accompanying sense of permanence and/or universality, and question the establishment of knowledge, reality and perception.
notion of politics to conceal its own historicity, contingency and ungroundable status. Through their work, we come to see that the ‘difference between’ politics and the political, to the extent to which it is deployed as radically disruptive, paves the way to positing the impossibility of a stable ground for politics. Although these thinkers may differ on the processes and/or particular effects of this dissolution (again, this is both expected and necessary because of its undecidable character), they nevertheless agree that this dissolution of ground is the condition of (im)possibility for each of their political projects. In fact, politics, to a certain extent, has come to depend upon these ruptures (of its meanings, institutions, discursive practices) in order not to become the totality of violence, sociality, power and ideology that it seems always on the verge of becoming. Likewise, one could argue that without the everpresent possibility of the violence of totality, there would be no place for the emergence of the political.

In the work of Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe in *Retreating the Political*, the work of understanding politics is approached from two inextricable angles: on one hand, each of their respective interventions is a deconstruction of the political; on the other hand, through this deconstruction, each of them also demands a rejuvenation (in the dual sense of transformation and renewal) of the question of the political. But there is arguably a third dimension to this work, through which the political is perhaps initially ungrounded, and this dimension demands that we also engage the question of the relation or (co-relation) between the philosophical and political realms. Because Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe approach the political by way of its retreat, they must constantly work to differentiate the political from politics as given: for example, in using ‘the political,’ they “fully intend not to designate politics.”130 By politics, they refer to certain forms of action (technological, social) and

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130 Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, *Retreating the Political*, 110.
thinking (calculative, instrumental, bureaucratized). Politics deals with problems via administrative means, and in so doing, subverts any form of radical questioning. They are extremely critical of the notion that ‘everything is political’ for precisely this reason. The political is made manifest or visible only in its retreat from this kind of thinking. The retreat constitutes a “re-tracing of the political, re-marking it, by raising the question in a new way.” The political, then, will never retreat or disappear completely; it always leaves a ‘trace’ (in the Derridian sense) through which it ‘re-traces’ itself as a question to be asked again. There is a double movement here in the sense that what is ‘re-traced’ is the political itself (in the sense that it begins to become apprehensible once more), where the possibility of reinventing its actual conditions remains open.

This manner of thinking politics reveals itself in a similar way in Nancy’s approach to the question of community in *The Inoperative Community* and *Being Singular Plural*. Looking briefly here to Nancy’s concept of community, it is important to emphasize that the community that he seeks does not historically preexist society, but instead appears in the wake of society as an event. Community, for Nancy, cannot be founded upon any ideal of essence, fusion or collective production (working). That kind of thinking forecloses upon the political through the implication of a ‘common being’ (or ‘being common’): “it loses the with or the together that defines it.” As in Derrida’s example of democracy, community must be left open to possibility through a perpetual unworking that is proper to it. Nancy calls for a community that is immanently and constantly engaged in its own unworking, that is, “a community consciously undergoing the experience of its sharing.” The political, then,

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131 Ibid., 112.
132 Ibid., 139.
133 Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 11.
134 Ibid., *preface*, xxxix.
135 Ibid., 40.
comes to designate for Nancy the ‘disposition’ of community as such. The political cannot be
dissolved into the “sociotechnical element of forces and needs,” nor does the term depend
upon the notion of a ‘political will.’\footnote{Ibid., 40-41.} Instead, the political implies “being already engaged,”
and “undergoing, in whatever manner, the experience of community as communication.”\footnote{Ibid., 41.}
Like the political, this new form of community refuses the fixed meanings which belong to
the order of politics so that it might better resist the trappings of certain forms of sociality
related to totality and domination which have come to be associated with them. It contains a
built-in self-differentiation that constantly ruptures the thin membrane of closure that begins
to form around any communal entity, preventing it from becoming a One.

Badiou also engages in a division of politics, and it could even be argued that he
would agree that there is a ‘crisis’ (or ‘retreat’) of the political, though this unfolds in a
different way here. First and foremost, however, we must note that there is a significant shift
in the use of terms (that is mirrored in Rancière’s work). Badiou does not use the terms
‘politics’ and ‘the political,’ and although the two ‘positions’ behave in similar ways in his
work, there are important distinctions to be made. Badiou uses the term ‘politics’ in place of
‘the political’ in order to describe the order of event and of truth. According to Jason Barker,
for Badiou, “politics is that which radically detracts, or subtracts itself, from all experience of
what ‘the social world’ actually is. […]it is] a singular work, a mobile capacity that constantly
defies classification […]”\footnote{Jason Barker, “Translator’s Introduction,” in Alain Badiou, \textit{Metapolitics} (New York: Verso, 2006), ix.} In his own words, Badiou explains that, “since every politics is a
singularity, there can be no definition of politics. Every definition relates politics to

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{Ibid., 40-41.}
\item \footnote{Ibid., 41.}
\item \footnote{Jason Barker, “Translator’s Introduction,” in Alain Badiou, \textit{Metapolitics} (New York: Verso, 2006), ix.}
\end{itemize}
something other than itself (in fact, most often the State), and de-singularizes it by historicising it.”

On the other side of this relation, replacing the term ‘politics’ in its ontic sense, we find the the ‘situation,’ which for Badiou is essentially the social world. Badiou is critical of others’ formulations of ‘the political,’ however, because he is suspicious of its ties to political philosophy and thus with a preoccupation with plurality, or what he calls ‘the sovereignty of the One.’ His politics, by contrast, ruptures this notion of the One. According to Badiou, this ‘situation’ (the social world, ‘reality’) is grounded on a void – what he calls an ‘inconsistent multiplicity’ – which is typically covered over by the ‘count-as-one’ (the function that creates the appearance of consistency, agreement or homogeneity in a situation), the state, and whatever dominant ideology is circulating within that situation. As is the case for our other theorists, however, the construction of the social world as a homogeneous totality is premised upon an exclusion, an excess which does not fit. It is precisely here, at the site where the excluded part and inconsistent multiplicity are suppressed and hidden, that becomes the site of revolution. The event, that is, the rupturing of the situation by a politics, is what allows this excluded part to be represented, thus producing new truths and new subjects.

According to Badiou, the event is unnameable. Accordingly, the event cannot be identified (as event, as experience) from the perspective of its actual appearance. There is a quality of externality, then, located in the delayed temporal character of its nomination as event. His designation of the ‘future anterior’ as the time of ‘real politics’ means that the

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139 Badiou, Metapolitics, 46.
140 Ibid., 10, 18-19.
141 Badiou, Being and Event, 25, 90. I expand on Badiou’s notion of ‘inconsistent multiplicity’ in chapter 5.
142 Badiou, Metapolitics, 47.
143 Badiou, Being and Event, 201.
temporality of the event is figured in terms of what will have been. This is also the time of the subject, insofar as the subject cannot be said to exist prior to the event; subjectivization comes through the act of nomination, or in claiming one’s stake in that event by naming it and being faithful to it. The event fundamentally disrupts the structures through which it unfolds: history, politics, the subject, knowledge and even reason. For Badiou, politics doesn’t ‘represent’ anything – it is the work of undermining immediate representation. We can recall, an event can be said to have taken place when the excluded part suddenly appears or presents itself (as unpresentable), rupturing the apparent coherence of the dominant situation and offering us a glimpse of ‘truth’ in a temporary unveiling of inconsistent multiplicity. Potentially, then, any excluded part could be a future evental site. These one-count structures are fragile for several reasons, but most notably because they are subjective. After all, the application of a ‘one-count’ is the result of a series of decisions rather than some kind of objective truth. Moreover, by virtue of their exclusion, those excluded parts cannot be effectively managed. Through the politics of the event, Badiou reveals to us the contingency of these foundations, exposing the one-count as a (temporarily) universalized fiction.

Badiou’s theory of revolution is based on the argument that true ‘thought’ is always oriented toward what is excluded from a particular system, that which belongs to a system through its exclusion from that system, a void or an ‘empty set.’ This excluded part is unrepresentable insofar as it is observed from the perspective of the dominant ontology, yet it

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144 Ibid., 210-211.
145 Ibid., 392-394.
146 By ‘truth’ I mean to indicate the ‘real basis’ for our everyday experience of whichever dominant ideology is structuring reality at that time.
147 This is essentially how the excluded part is characterized in Badiou’s work preceeding Logics of Worlds, where he begins to use the term “inexistent” to refer to that part which has no existence in the sense of appearing as self-present. In this sense, the excluded part has an extremely high degree of ‘inexistent aspects’ insofar it isn’t seen (or is only barely seen) in the situation.
signifies that there is more to ‘being’ than the situation can represent through sense, knowledge or language. This void disrupts the ontological order by virtue of its presence, and this disruptive element becomes the Evental site. Not unlike Rancière, Badiou characterizes political orders in terms of their being an imposed homogeneity or consistency (a ‘count-for-one’) that is imposed upon what is, in reality, an ‘inconsistent multiplicity,’ or an excess of what exists over what can actually be represented within any particular system.¹⁴⁸ This excess is concealed by the state; the true structure of a situation is only ever revealed in moments of disruption or dislocation. Politically, this indicates that the excluded part is subversive, insofar as it stands, in many cases, in radical opposition to the state’s preservation of the existing order.

In Badiou’s work, the event fundamentally disrupts the structures through which it unfolds, namely history, politics and the ‘subject’ of politics (for example, the proletariat), but also knowledge and reason. The event belongs to the order of the Real (in the Lacanian sense); therefore it cannot be mediated or communicated. The ‘ethics’ of the event, then, which Badiou comes to develop at great length, is “an ethics of the Real, if it is true that – as Lacan suggests – all access to the Real is of the order of an encounter.”¹⁴⁹ Badiou’s designation of the ‘future anterior’ as the time of ‘real politics’ is central to his notion of the event as what will have been. This is also the ‘time’ of the subject, insofar as the subject cannot be said to exist prior to the event; subjectivization comes in claiming one’s stake in that event by naming it and maintaining a fidelity to it. We can say the same about community for Badiou. For Badiou, then, politics doesn’t ‘present’ (or represent) anything, but is instead the work of undermining immediate representation. It is only to the extent that

¹⁴⁸ See Being and Event for the best description of Badiou’s ontology of ‘inconsistent multiplicity’ and how it is connected to his theory of the Event.
politics escapes the logic of representation that it approaches the ‘real,’ which has a different logic entirely, and it is this logic in which we are interested here. The event does not ‘retreat’ from representation (as the political does for Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe), but rather arrives to confront, disrupt and fundamentally challenge it. As an aesthetic phenomenon of sense beyond understanding, the event cannot be communicated; it can only be encountered. We cannot properly ‘experience’ the event, because the event does not properly ‘belong’ to the situation into/out of which it erupts. It is unknowable (or in Derridian terms, ‘undecidable’) until it is named.

Despite the many philosophical disagreements between Rancière and Badiou, there are certain elements of their work on structure and disruption in politics that are nevertheless strikingly similar. In Rancière’s work, politics in the radical sense (what Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe call the political) is distinguished from what he terms ‘police.’ In “Ten Theses,” he characterizes politics and police as two ways of “counting the parts of the community.”

Police (or ‘the police order’ for the sake of clarity) refers to the set of empirical procedures through which power is organized, society is ordered and consent is cultivated. Akin to Badiou’s ‘excluded part’ or void, Rancière understands politics as that which “counts ‘in addition,’ a part of the no-part,” referring to “the nature of political subjects who are not social groups but rather forms of inscription of ‘the (ac)count of the unaccounted-for.’”

Politics, then, is what fundamentally disrupts and ungrounds policing. It is precisely what is excluded from the police order. It is the part that has no part and therefore cannot be counted. Politics emerges through the disagreement between the (non-political) condition of equality and the logic of policing: “The foundation of politics is… the lack of foundation, the sheer

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150 Rancière (2001), T6 s19.
151 Ibid.
152 Ibid., T6 s18.
contingency of any social order. Politics exists simply because no social order is based on nature, no divine law on human society.”

Politics does not lay claim to any form of absolute truth or set of superior principles. Its primary role is to disrupt, unground or rupture the very ‘order’ of the police order. Put in Badiouian terms, its role is to expose the excess of inconsistent multiplicity which underlies the false homogeneity of the state. For Rancière, the contradiction between the logic of politics and the logic of police is “an unchanging given that defines the contingency and precariousness proper to politics.” If we mistake the police order for politics, we eliminate the possibility of any genuine political moment. Like Badiou, then, Rancière points to a problematic relation between appearance and truth that unfolds within the play of politics and aesthetics.

Rupture performs another significant role in the way in which Rancière theorizes the correlation between aesthetics and politics. In The Politics of Aesthetics, Rancière argues that the distribution of the sensible is an aesthetic activity. For Rancière, aesthetics does not refer to a set of artistic practices, the general theory concerning these practices, nor even a theory of sense experience per se. Instead, Rancière’s understanding of aesthetics is principally derived from Kant’s theory of a priori forms in the Critique of Pure Reason, and how these forms ultimately determine what is presented to us through our sense experience (and what remains hidden).

Rancière argues that the relation between aesthetics and politics is analogous to the relation between Kant’s a priori forms and sense experience: just as a priori forms determine the organization of and conditions of possibility for human experience, aesthetics serves both to condition the shared world of experience and to partition that world into the various positions we are given to occupy within it. Although politics is not reducible

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153 Rancière, Disagreement, 16.
to this partitioning of the sensible, it is nevertheless conditioned by aesthetics in a manner similar to the way in which sense experience is conditioned by *a priori* forms. In other words, as we briefly discussed in the preceding paragraph, it is dependant upon these ‘partitions of the sensible’ as its space of disruption. The aesthetics to which we refer in this case is not formulated to replace those partitions of the sensible, but rather as an aesthetics which will erupt from *within* those partitions, temporarily challenging and even dismantling our experience of the sensible world.156

Although he does not promote a split between politics and the political, Derrida is certainly a thinker of politics - though not everyone would agree. In *Ontology and Equivocation*, Elizabeth Grosz writes about Derrida’s less than warm reception by North American political theorists, noting that these critics tend to be thinkers who seek to be reassured that their own convictions keep them firmly positioned on the ‘right side,’ that they possess knowledge of the good and that they are acting politically to fulfill a moral obligation.157 Arguably, it is precisely this kind of thinking that feeds discourses of the ‘end of politics’ by subverting resistance in favor of a new totality. Grosz argues that Derrida’s work on politics, on the other hand, is aimed mainly at uncovering the “complex and paradoxical nature of *any* political commitment,” and “rethinking entirely the ways in which politics and theory have been considered.”158 What he ultimately aims at is a politics that is always ‘unsettled’; this alternative is, again, not a solution as such, but rather the perpetual problematization (through aporia) of any sense of ‘rightness,’ truthfulness, or value that seeks to set a particular set of ideals above all others.159 Thus the true value, in my opinion, of

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156 While *The Politics of Aesthetics* is, for obvious reasons, a resource that I continuously reference in this project, it is actually the arguments made in *Disagreement* that frame this notion most compellingly.
158 Ibid, 122. My emphasis.
Derrida’s work to thinkers of politics lies precisely in this ‘unsettled,’ disruptive, decentering force.

Derrida’s work has taught us that the will to silence others through the elimination of alternatives to one’s claims of truth and rightness for their own position must always ultimately undermine itself, since it remains bound up with those ‘other’ truths it seeks to negate. One cannot simply ‘choose’ one side of an opposition, nor can one expect to arrive at a compromise between those two sides. The aim of deconstruction is, first and foremost, to ensure that discourse remains open to its own reinterpretations and rewritings, or to those exceptions which contain the seeds of rupture and revolution. In Derrida and the Political, Richard Beardsworth credits deconstruction with opening the possibility for reinventing political concepts. Rupture and disruption, in some form, are central to deconstruction, but the disruptive force of the political is always already also a creative force. For example, ‘decision’ always requires the decision-making subject to take a theoretical leap toward the unknown in order for that subject to be responsible to that decision. Derrida writes that decision must “surprise the very subjectivity of the subject.” Decision, if it is to be responsible, forces the subject out of both ‘certain knowledge’ (with the leap toward the unknown) and out of all of her relations of identity – out of her self. In other words, through decision, one must become an ‘other’ to oneself. The subject is created as something other than the cohesive self-present subject of Enlightenment, open to new possibilities.

In his treatment of the democracy to come, we can again locate the seed of rupture as already contained within the logic of democracy itself, for example, in the impossibility of reconciling ‘liberty’ and ‘equality.’ Derrida’s use of autoimmunity serves as a way in

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161 Derrida, The Politics of Friendship, 68.
which to characterize his overtly political theory more generally. Autoimmunity, in philosophy as in medicine, refers to the phenomenon of an entity (a body) that attacks or kills a part of itself because this is necessary in order for that entity to continue to exist. In this sense, we can better understand Derrida’s claim that autoimmunity is what characterizes democracy. In practice, the ‘parts’ of democracy that constantly come under attack are liberty and equality (though, never at the same time). Moreover, it is because of the absent form of democracy (insofar as it has no preset structure of government), that it is left open both to threat and to the possibility of better government; it is in this possibility of ‘something better’ that Derrida locates the democracy-to-come. In a similar sense, Derrida also argues that the globalized ‘world’ of enlightenment will likewise remain to-come, precisely because it cannot account (through reason) for that disruptive otherness which takes the form of singular, unpredictable events. Derrida shows that the question of the event, which for him would be that which is ‘to-come,’ ushers in a way of thinking that interferes with our ability to create and maintain a sense of teleological progression in our account of history. By virtue of the possibility of their existence, these events also herald the possibility of a limitless future. If we take this possibility seriously, it undermines our existing understandings not only of history and the ideal of progress, but also reason itself. I return to these aspects of Derrida’s work in chapter 4.

At the beginning of “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” Derrida gets sidetracked in his discussion of the history of the concept of structure by his own use of the term ‘event.’ In his opinion, the word ‘event’ is too laden with meaning. This is a problem because the aim in thinking structure in the abstract (the

163 For his discussion on the interplay between autoimmunity and the ‘democracy to come,’ see Ibid., 35-39.  
164 Ibid, 143.  
“structurality of structure”) is to diminish the importance that we place on events (which are ‘concretes’ or “fixed origins”), thus freeing the ‘play’ of structure. But because Derrida needs nevertheless to discuss something that happened, he grudgingly places the word in quotation marks, moving on to describe this “event” as having the form of “a rupture and a redoubling.” Before he reveals what the event is, however, he discusses the ‘center,’ or that which gives structure its ‘structurality.’ He writes, “it has always been thought that the center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality.” What this means is that the centre is both contained within the structure as its organizing element, but is also external to the structure insofar as it also governs that structure. Therefore, Derrida concludes, “the center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (it is not part of the totality), the totality has its center elsewhere. The center is not the center.”

The event, then, refers to the time at which we began to recognize this problem and begin thinking that there was no actually and/or naturally existing center, but instead only a function, thus creating two ‘interpretations of interpretation.’ On one hand, the ‘old’ way in which one “dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign,” and on the other, a new way “which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who, throughout [his entire history –] has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play.” Derrida is careful to note that we have not left this past behind us; on the contrary, we now find these two interpretations of interpretation

166 Ibid., 352.
167 Ibid., 351. Original emphasis.
168 Ibid., 352.
169 Ibid. I expand upon this notion through Derrida’s reading of Kant and the parergon in chapter 5.
170 Ibid., 369-370.
functioning simultaneously, most evidently within the social sciences, even though they are completely incompatible. My project – this project – represents a sustained attempt to articulate some of the ways in which this event has become manifest in political thought, specifically with regard to the political subject, collective judgment and its political impact, teleology, aesthetics and the critical role they have to play in political theory, and the necessity of disrupting our apprehension of harmonious totality in order to prevent it from becoming oppressive or tyrannical, all of which we will further unpack over the following pages.

The unbridled enthusiasm that is unleashed at the notion of doing away with totality once and for all, has worked only to entrench totality ever more deeply at the heart of political discourse. I argue that we see this entrenchment now, not only in the forms of totalitarianism that we have fought so hard against, but in those forms of social and political exclusion that we don’t often associate overtly with totality but which are nevertheless intimately bound up with it – exclusion as the absent center of totality. The demand for agreement necessarily implies a demand for exclusion. It is possible that this kind of social and political exclusion could be construed as merely an effect or excess of totality, but I believe that this interpretation only works to further dispossess the excluded part, completely ignoring its revolutionary potential as well as its (un)grounding function. That notion of the excluded part as ‘collateral damage’ in the drive toward harmonious totality distorts or negates many of the political challenges we are currently facing, from our increasing loss of faith in democracy to the increasingly urgent problem of dispossession that we finally see acknowledged as a global issue. This is precisely the reason that I have lingered so long on the idea of rupture and the critical role it plays in contemporary theory. Specifically, I argue

171 Ibid., 370.
that it is the excluded part that we see emerging in contemporary theory as a potential revolutionary hero, the very thing which resurrects politics in the wake of its imagined death at the ‘end of history.’

Rather than belonging to either politics or the political, this subject emerges within, occupies and attempts to navigate the space of relation between system and radical sense, which is currently a space of dissensus and/or antagonism.\(^{172}\) This space of relation is at once a condition of possibility for and poses a serious challenge to the problem of totality or unity in politics, both conceptually and in our practical everyday experience.\(^{173}\) The play between limit and possibility is necessary in order to avoid thinking totality in terms of some form of universalism, totalitarianism or hegemony, as we have for centuries. The subject of this politics, who I come to call the ‘ek-static subject’ in the final chapter, is always already collective. It is not identity, but a lack thereof that becomes the catalyst of subjectivation. More specifically, this subject is formed as a result of having taken a step back from this identity, moving from a ‘right place’ to a ‘wrong place,’ and keeping those ‘right’ identifications at arm’s length in order to remain open to other relations and possibilities. The alternatives that we are offered by the thinkers I engage with in this project push us to confront and rewrite our understanding of totality through new perspectives on intersubjectivity as something that is alive: an irreducible, temporary, heterogeneous, differentiated (yet nevertheless collective) and unlocatable relation to/among others that is

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\(^{172}\) I will return to this characterization at length in my discussion of Jacques Rancière a bit further into this project.

\(^{173}\) I have gone back and forth many times in writing and rewriting this dissertation between the terms ‘totality’ and ‘unity.’ The former is problematic because it carries with it the weight the fascisms of the 19\(^{th}\) and 20\(^{th}\) centuries. The latter, however, carries with it the baggage of its so-called positive connotations, most notably some form of an emancipatory promise that has always been tied to cooperation and/or ‘brotherhood’ through political community. My conclusion is that, given that we discuss community at some length in this project, the positive baggage carried by the concept ‘unity’ is far more difficult to ask the reader to set aside. Afterall, I am not challenging the notion that totality and totalitarianism are intimately connected. I am simply arguing that the philosophical use of the term ‘totality’ stretches much further than this particular manifestation.
perpetually engaged in its own unworking. I contend that this understanding of political subjectivity challenges us to think the political subject as the product of political action rather than its source, and to think politics beyond the metaphysics of presence, and acknowledge the central roles played by absence and exclusion.
Chapter 2: Inoperative Identifications and Post-Identity Politics

In the preceding chapter, the central line of inquiry that I set up involved a set of relations between totality, the politicization of identity, and its reliance on a founding exclusion in order to create and sustain both subjects and communities. Here, I explore this tension between the individual and the community more deeply. Since I have already touched upon some of the prohibitions and ruptures that this tension can produce (and because I return to this in depth in chapter 5), these three middle chapters are focused more heavily upon what I see causing the tension itself than on the effects of that tension. In this chapter, I focus my discussion on the personal, social and political identity of our current configuration of the subject, and how it is constructed and deployed in relation to community and activism. In chapters 3 and 4, I shift that focus to the relation between identity, individual and community in light of modern democracy, specifically in terms of the ‘identity crisis’ that democracy is currently undergoing. My inquiry in this chapter involves a critique of identity politics that further develops the connections between aesthetics, totality, identity, exclusion and community by introducing another layer to the problem: a critique of the unified notion of identity upon which emancipatory politics has been grounded, and which actually works against political subjectivation.

In radically altering our understandings of identity, subjectivity and community as stable grounds upon which to stage an emancipatory politics, thinkers such as Rancière,
Badiou, Nancy, Laclau, Lefort, Judith Butler and Roberto Esposito have enabled us to theorize political subjects and communities as occupying the ever-changing spaces of opposition between individuals and communities, and between those who take part and those who have no part.\textsuperscript{174} In this chapter, in solidarity with these thinkers, I argue that the rejection of ‘fixed’ identity as a final ground for the formation of political communities must take place in order to open a space of possibility for a politics that preserves the spirit of mutual recognition and shared experience out of which identity politics was born, while avoiding the tendency toward the hierarchical re-inscription of those identities and dissolution of solidarity that tends to accompany it. Before we can begin to understand the community and the subject in ways that are neither totalizing nor exclusionary, we must first expound the weakened ontological status of ‘right’ identifications and lay the foundations for thinking a political subject (both individual and collective) that is actively and perpetually engaged in a process of \textit{becoming} through disidentification and ‘unworking.’\textsuperscript{175} The value in this shift in thinking lies in its dismantling of our dependence on identity as the central organizing principle of political action and resistance, which tends to render freedom, equality and community as afterthoughts rather than preconditions of political engagement.

\textit{(i) Inequality, Identity, and the Politics of (not) Belonging}

Debates between essentialists and social constructionists on the nature and origin of identity have been raging for decades.\textsuperscript{176} Social constructionism has been considered the

\textsuperscript{174} I engage these thinkers on their understandings of community in chapter 4.
\textsuperscript{175} The notion that disidentification is itself a politics is continued as a central theme in chapter 5.
benchmark for a progressive understanding of the social, moral and political world for some time. Michael Taussig, for example, has gone so far as to argue that saying that something is socially constructed is not really an argument at all, but a statement of fact. Rather than simply ‘exposing’ certain phenomena as socially constructed, he argues that we should be unearthing the how and why of these constructions, as well as seeking alternatives where appropriate. When it comes to identity, however, this supposed givenness of the social construction argument becomes highly problematic. The ways in which people interpret themselves (through feelings, appearance, movements, desires, practices, etc.) on a day-to-day basis in order to situate themselves in the world, in combination with our broader social and cultural understandings of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, etc., and community have the power to both strengthen and undermine political activism. We use our identities to seek social and political legitimacy at both the individual and collective levels. These strategies of validation in turn mediate the relations between individuals, communities and political activism. In this section, I argue that some proponents of identity politics nevertheless depend upon embracing a certain kind of essentialism as a ground for that legitimacy, and as a result, ultimately reinscribe new hierarchies rather than eradicate them.

There are two intimately related aspects of the politics of identity around which my discussion revolves here: the impact of using identity to ground political organization and action, and philosophical questions about subjectivity and selfhood. In both cases, the language of ‘authenticity’ plays a central role. From a philosophical perspective, thinkers such as Charles Taylor write about authenticity and identity as being linked to one’s ‘inner

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voice,’ where the familiar advice to ‘be your authentic self’ is linked to living the good life.\footnote{\citenum{Taylor94}} It is unsurprising, then, that the contemporary ‘politics of difference’ also makes heavy use of the language of authenticity with regard to the identities of marginalized groups. What makes this particular deployment of authenticity unique is the fact that these marginalized groups are demanding recognition on the basis of those very aspects of their identities that were the grounds upon which recognition had formerly been denied. As Sonia Kruks writes, “it is \textit{qua} women, \textit{qua} blacks, \textit{qua} lesbians that groups demand recognition […] what is demanded is respect for oneself \textit{as} different,” where arguably, the very seat of that difference is also the source of one’s ‘authenticity.’\footnote{\citenum{Kruks01}} Moreover, this seat of difference is made up of both identity markers and \textit{experience}; that is, identity politics is far more concerned with the shared experience of oppression than it is about the sharing of certain characteristics or sensibilities. There is therefore something akin to a phenomenology of identity at work in the formation of identity groups, which performs a ratifying function out of which the level of authenticity of a particular identification is then determined.\footnote{\citenum{Alcoff00; Oksala04; Stoller09}} This, I argue, is where identity politics is forced to confront this connection between authenticity and essentialism, the disciplinary function these distinctions play in policing group membership (especially in terms of imposing limits on members’ self-understanding), and the limits of its unifying claims.

Let us return for a moment to the notion, ‘the personal is the political.’ This slogan pointed to the fact that the struggles that marginalized peoples experienced in ‘private’ were

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\item \citenum{Kruks01} Sonia Kruks, \textit{Retrieving Experience: Subjectivity and Recognition in Feminist Politics} (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 85.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
actually rooted in political inequality. This moment marked the rise to prominence of identity politics, which I have defined very broadly here as the politics of a shared experience of injustice and the struggle for recognition. More recently, however, this notion has become increasingly vulnerable to antagonistic understandings of both identity and shared experience. The peculiar stories that emerged in 2015 of Rachel Dolezal, a white woman presenting herself as a mixed-race leader in the NAACP, and Shaun King, an activist for the Black Lives Matter movement who, following the Dolezal controversy, was publicly ‘accused’ of being white by conservative news media, raised many questions new and old about the construction of identity, the social imaginary, and the performative dimensions of identity and identification – in these cases, what it means to ‘do’ blackness. The immense pressure that has historically been put on non-whites to ‘pass’ as white created a backlash through which this behavior came to be seen as a form of racial betrayal and self-hatred. What was relatively new, however, was the intense media scrutiny on these cases in which people of other races either were attempting or were accused of attempting to pass as black or bi-racial in order to participate in emancipatory politics. The notion that someone belonging to a historically privileged identity group, whatever their intentions, might attempt to ‘infiltrate’ various civil rights groups in order to participate has not only caused fragmentation and mistrust within these groups, but has also raised some frighteningly familiar questions of racial purity (also related to authenticity and belonging), albeit in an altered socio-political context.

We have also witnessed a shift in the way that marginalized groups interact with one another. Far from nurturing a sense of solidarity among the oppressed, some argue that the politics of identity today is marked by the emergence of a ‘hierarchy of oppression’ within which a person’s status and merit depends, to a large extent, on the degree to which they are
perceived to have been victimized.\textsuperscript{181} There are many supporters of identity politics who passionately reject this notion, but this critique usually takes shape as an ethical stance against such a hierarchy rather than an empirical denial of its existence.\textsuperscript{182} To cite a local example, there was a great deal of controversy surrounding a protest staged by Black Lives Matter during the 2016 Toronto Pride Parade that saw the two formerly collaborating groups suddenly at odds with one another. Moments such as this mark the emergence of a discourse (taken up on both the left and the right) that points to a shift in leftist communities away from the focus upon embracing identity and diversity \textit{tout court} (or perhaps paradoxically aligned with it), toward the hyper-particularization of identity markers that has contributed to the construction of such a hierarchy. Moreover, the reinforcement of this hierarchy through policy – where certain identity groups are granted rights while others are still denied them – points us toward an increasingly narrow understanding of the role of identity in politics on behalf of policy makers.

Perhaps the most disturbing trend in this kind of analysis is the ever-increasing conflation of identity-based politics with certain forms of violence. The term ‘violence’ is deployed here, not because these movements use physical force or have violent aims, but because some of their effects (for example, their delegitimizing effects) can be understood to be destructive, albeit in a more ambiguous sense. In the case of the Black Lives Matter protest at Toronto Pride for example, activists were accused of having held the celebration ‘hostage,’ refusing to allow it to continue until their demands had been met. In this case, the original message of the BLM protest, which was aimed at protesting police presence and

\textsuperscript{181} For an overview and an interesting critique of some of the issues surrounding it, see Linda Briskin, “Identity Politics and the Hierarchy of Oppression: A Comment,” \textit{Feminist Review} 35 (Summer, 1990): 102-108.

\textsuperscript{182} Most critics of this notion refer back to a famous piece written by Audre Lorde titled “There is No Hierarchy of Oppressions,” reproduced in \textit{Bulletin: Homophobia and Education} 14 (3/4: 1983): 8-9.
participation in Pride events in order to bring attention to the continued violence committed upon black communities by police, was almost completely overshadowed by the (often racist and homophobic) debates that emerged about privileging certain aspects of identity over others, and about policing activism itself by making judgments about where, when, and under what circumstances activism is deemed ‘appropriate.’ In the cases of King and Dolezal, this violence is represented in the form of ‘whiteness’ and the perceived dangers associated with it. The relations between identities and violence are in no way limited to racial identities, of course, as similar arguments are also made about affluence and poverty, degrees of masculinity, sexual orientation, or any other subject position that has been linked specifically either to extreme privilege or to extreme disadvantage. Sidestepping the glaringly obvious problems with the construction of this kind of relation, it almost completely overlooks the larger social and political systems of power that both provide the conditions of possibility for, and impose limits upon, the emergence of particular identities as privileged or disadvantaged, which arguably is where the seat of resistance would also be found.183

Examples such as those discussed above are fast becoming indicative of the growing challenges we face in attempting to enact an emancipatory politics that takes identity as its ground. I point here to three major effects it appears to have had thus far. First, we have begun to see the degree to which any historically privileged identity and activism are becoming more and more contraindicated in the minds of the Left. Rachel Dolezal’s case is especially interesting in this respect. Her racial heritage only came to be called into question during the investigation into her claims that she had been the victim of several hate crimes. In the aftermath that followed her parents’ confirmation that she is in fact biologically Caucasian, Dolezal responded with the assertion that she identifies as ‘transracial.’ This

identification sparked heated debates about the connections (or lack thereof) between transracial and transgender identities, as well as outcry from the transracial adoption community, who maintain that the term already has a specific meaning and context and thus should not be co-opted. In the midst of the intense outcry that Rachel Dolezal’s case caused, we saw a reinvigorated discussion of ‘passing’ and its social, political, and aesthetic significance in this context.

Second, in the example of Shaun King’s case, we see that the Right has begun to deploy the tactic of making accusations of whiteness (or of any relevant privilege) in an attempt to discredit their critics, despite the fact that the ‘accuser’ usually embodies several of these positions. What we saw in King’s case is that whether or not the accusations were true became irrelevant (they were false), because the accusation itself was sufficiently damaging and had the effect of largely silencing him in the minds of others. Finally, cases such as these are indicative of an ideological shift away from the shared experience of injustice as the object of focus for emancipatory politics, toward a focus on who is experiencing that suffering and injustice, in order to evaluate their ‘worth’ as an object of concern. The consequences of this final shift are perhaps the most damaging to what were once the shared ideals upon which identity politics was initially constructed, especially in the case of equality. Our assertions that black lives are of equal value to white lives, that


186 The original accusation was made by blogger Vicki Pate on her blog “Re-NewsIt!” and was picked up and spread widely in an article titled “Did Black Lives Matter Organizer Shaun King Mislead Oprah Winfrey by Pretending to be Biracial?” on the conservative ‘news’ website Breitbart. Accessed October 10, 2016. [http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2015/08/19/did-black-lives-matter-organiser-shaun-king-mislead-oprah-winfrey-by-pretending-to-be-biracial/]
homosexual lives are of equal value to heterosexual ones, that Muslim lives are of equal value to Christian ones, that women are of equal value to men, that the lives of refugees are of equal value to those of citizens, etc., are increasingly met with, at best, a “yes, but…” and at worst, open hostility.

the democratic imaginary: a narcissism of small differences?

Rather than sharing in a united struggle for mutual recognition, we see a hyper-personalization of the political. Leaving behind the challenges and criticisms we face which come from the Right, those which come from within our own communities can be far more damaging. This can take the form of a reimagining of radical individualism, the fetishization of oppression, the creation of a hierarchy of victims, and/or the manufacture of ‘authentic’ vs. ‘inauthentic’ suffering that is grounded, first and foremost, in identities that are increasingly defined by and through fixed differences. Perhaps the first question we should be asking here is, why is this happening? Why does it appear to be the case that the struggle for social and political freedom and equality compels us to try to limit and police the social and political freedom and equality of others? I believe that Freud’s thesis about the ‘narcissism of small differences’ offers us a compelling perspective on this issue.¹⁸⁷ In a (shamefully reductive) nutshell, Freud’s argument is that, due to the human tendency toward aggression and the desire for distinct identity, we are often most hostile toward those with whom we share the most in common. In the case of civil rights activism, we catch glimpses of a similar phenomenon at work. I argue that this problem arises as a reaction against the

¹⁸⁷ Freud first coined the term in 1917, but it appears in several forms in his work, most notably in Civilization and Its Discontents, trans. James Stratchey (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1961) 72.

I would like to note here that my use of this term is in no way meant to imply that the struggles themselves are small, or that every activist is inherently narcissistic. Instead, I argue that this notion offers us a glimpse into one of the causes of the lack of solidarity we continue to see among various groups who all strive for equality, recognition and inclusion.
widespread tendency to view and speak about racialized communities as homogenous. In the same sense that one cannot assume that all women or all homosexuals experience discrimination and oppression in exactly the same way, it is equally absurd to assume that all racialized communities in general or all members of a particular racialized community in particular would. It makes sense, then, that over the last 50 years we have seen a proliferation of identity groups with increasingly specific designations.

I argue that these inter-group tensions are driven by the struggle for recognition in a time and place where, as Jean-Luc Nancy has pointed out, the signs to which we used to anchor our identities (and the certainty with which we did so) are disappearing.\textsuperscript{188} We constitute our identities by differentiating ourselves from others through increasingly specific signs because we have been working so hard to establish equality, yet this occurs at the cost of the exclusion of ever-growing numbers of ‘other’ identities. I would go a step further to argue that these exclusionary practices often end up working to deny equality rather than creating it, offering only general equivalence and ‘passive equality’ in its place.\textsuperscript{189} Amy Gutmann does an excellent job of describing the polarizing position that identity groups occupy in democracy. On one hand, critics argue that group identities work to constrain individuals rather than liberating them, through things like stereotyping and loss of individuality.\textsuperscript{190} When the individual themselves identifies along racial, ethnic or religious lines as a result of having been identified with these groups, hostilities toward and a sense of superiority over other groups can develop.\textsuperscript{191} This kind of inter-group conflict, where groups vie for superiority over one another, plays out at the expense of justice, equality and even

\textsuperscript{189} For a discussion of ‘active’ vs. ‘passive’ equality, see May, \textit{The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière}, 1-77. (Chapters 1 and 2).
\textsuperscript{191} Ibid., 1.
peace.\textsuperscript{192} On the other hand, those who defend identity politics are quick to point out that their critics’ image of the autonomous individual who neither identifies with groups nor is identified with them also presents a problem for democracy. Without any group identifications at all, individuals can only achieve radical isolation rather than the autonomy they seek.\textsuperscript{193} Group identities are therefore seen as offering the individual not only a more assured sense of self-knowledge, but a sense of social belonging as well. Perhaps most importantly, its defenders argue that “group identity propels women and disadvantaged minorities to counteract inherited negative stereotypes, defend more positive self-images, and develop respect for members of their groups.”\textsuperscript{194}

Seemingly inescapably, people identify with others by their social and political markers, and yet Gutmann points out that ‘identity’ and ‘identity groups’ are largely neglected in democratic theory in favour of ‘interest’ and ‘interest groups.’\textsuperscript{195} What we can be certain of, as Gutmann shrewdly affirms, is that “group identities are as abundant in democracies as they are controversial.”\textsuperscript{196} Nancy Fraser, another contemporary critic of identity politics, argues that political activism that is aimed solely at the valorization of a group’s “groupness” by formally acknowledging its specificity (which she calls ‘recognition models’ of justice), works only to reaffirm the oppressive structures that produce these identifications.\textsuperscript{197} She argues that recognition is only part of the picture, and that a focus on redistribution can work to combat the oppressive economic structures that are responsible for certain forms of injustice, for example. Indeed, the 2011 ‘Occupy’ movement can be seen as an example of a renewed connection between identity politics and anti-capitalist activism and

\textsuperscript{192} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{193} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{194} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{195} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid.
a renewed focus upon leftist critiques of class politics. Debates about the philosophical and political adequacy of identity politics as a site of resistance are likely to continue as long as the problems that have necessitated its creation persist.

Despite the attention to difference in more recent years as discussed above, my work in the following two chapters follows a line of inquiry that digs deeply into certain core democratic principles – liberty, equality and fraternity – and the extent to which our current understandings of these values continues to be shaped by the push toward consensus and totality.\footnote{198} ‘Equality’ for certain marginalized identities, for example, continues to be premised upon the idea of their proximate similarity to privileged identities. Even the term ‘individual’ (in its universalization) represents a homogenization of singularities. The democratic logic of general equivalence, though it is premised upon the notion of a collection of equal yet sovereign individuals, is not at all the same as the notions of political equality that we have been offered by thinkers such as Nancy, Derrida, Badiou, and Rancière. In “The Confronted Community,” Nancy writes:

What is coming upon us is an exhaustion of the thought defined by the One and by a unique destination for the world: this thought is exhausting itself through a unique absence of destination, through an infinite expansion of general equivalence or, then again, and as a repercussion of this, in the violent convulsions that reaffirm the all-powerfulness and the all-presence of a One become – or re-become – its own monstrousness.\footnote{199}

A few pages later, Nancy writes of the “inequality of the world to itself,” which renders it impossible to bestow itself with “sense, value, or truth,” thus plunging it into a state of

\footnote{198} This is the focus of my inquiry in chapter 3.  
general equivalence – that is, the general equivalence of ‘nothing.’ Each of these thinkers, in his own way, advocates instead for a principle of equality that is able to do justice to the irreducible singularity of those who are counted by it. For Rancière, this principle is located and expressed in the moment of political subjectivization. For Nancy, it is located in the singular plural as the equality of incommensurables. For Derrida, it is located in a particular form of friendship that is grounded in infinite alterity. For Badiou, it is located in the Idea of communism. What they share, however, is crucial here: a conception of equality that is not figured as an end or goal, but rather as a stimulus. The more united we become under any banner of the universal (the One), the closer we come to its absent center, to the impossibility of a final ground. We have created and nurtured a consensus at the level of identity that has thus far largely prevented us from approaching equality. This consensus involves our adherence to the notion that identity-based politics is the only way to end inequality and injustice, and it is reinforced through the intense attention to difference that is profuse in many discourses offered up through identity politics. Arguably, this is what happens when equality is the goal of association rather than the starting point.

This attention to difference does not, however, designate a widespread turn toward anything like a discussion of différance and its role in identity formation, which could have the power to completely reorient our understandings of identity, truth and presence. Instead, identity politics has largely remained focused upon ‘fixed differences,’ creating a complex web of increasingly differentiated groups whose differentiation can tend to work against the

200 Ibid., 26.
205 I return to this in depth in chapter 3, especially regarding Rancière.
struggles for recognition and equality that define them. To argue that this phenomenon is linked in a significant way to Freud’s observations about the ‘narcissism of small differences’ is not to imply that these differences are somehow trivial or inconsequential. Rather, I argue that the ‘narcissism of small differences’ highlights for us one of the key functions of Rancière’s understanding of ‘policing’: that is, to incorporate another term from Derrida, it represents a logic of autoimmunity at work in this kind of politics that actively prevents the formation of a ‘we’ that could otherwise emerge and disrupt the current distribution of the social.206 Freud’s point was that we tend to feel less threatened by the ‘Other’ with which we ultimately have very little in common than we do by the “nearly-we” or those with whom we have the most in common. In the struggle for recognition, then, it is those who most closely resemble us from whom we feel we must set ourselves apart. This is of course not the fault of identity groups, but rather the product of a system of governance within which there is only so much ‘equality’ to go around.

Any politics that is rooted in what Jacques Rancière calls ‘right’ identifications will fail to deliver on its promise of unification. In The Ignorant Schoolmaster, Rancière constructs a social metaphor using the law of gravity whereby he proposes that within the social realm, objects always end up in their ‘proper’ places.207 The effect that is produced by this notion of the gravitational arrangement of objects is a picture of society as harmonious and ordered. Through the intervention of the political (politics), however, the logical impossibility of an essence or ground lurks just below the surface of this harmonious order. During periods of stability, identity and community are able to circulate, but neither is constitutive of political subjectivity; it is only through the radical disruption of this order by

206 See Derrida, Rogues.
the intrusion of the political that political subjects are created. Political agents are acting subjects who are devoid of identity and of any claim to essence, becoming both universal and particular. Whereas ‘social’ bodies are bound together, political subjects are almost juxtaposed, bearing no such clear connection to one another with the exception of the presupposition of their equality.

As I have already touched upon, our ability to form identities often comes at the cost of reinforcing the exclusion of others, that ‘part with no part,’ that is the contingent foundation of the current distribution of the sensible. Another sentiment that is shared by the thinkers I engage here is that significant change only becomes possible through a radical disruption of the current state of things, which ultimately amounts to coming to terms with the ‘groundlessness’ of the social. This, in turn, forces us to confront the fact that we cannot control or determine the outcome of this encounter in advance, and thus the possibility that we (that ‘I’) might not be better off in this new distribution. In the words of Forrest Gump, “you never know what you’re going to get.” What may ultimately be required is nothing short of a radical ontological shift, a shift from thinking our (fixed) subject positions in terms of being and presence to thinking our subjectivities as fluid, as becoming. We would have to leave behind all of the apparent security and stability associated with occupying a fixed position that is produced in and through the setting of strict limits on what is possible. We would need to find a way to embody both the possible and the impossible, so that we would still be able to engage meaningfully with other subjects in the present context without losing sight of the unpredictability and openness that underlie the constant movement of becoming.
(ii) Ungrounding Identity: Becoming (Im)possible

In this section, I seek to further trouble our reliance upon identity as the foundation for political community. First, I work to establish more deeply the role that aesthetics has to play in this analysis by offering a reading of Kant’s notion of ‘hypotyposis’ as playing a key role in identity formation through its ‘reality producing’ function. Second, I offer a brief overview of post-foundational thought in light of the ways in which I see it as indispensable to this search for collective arrangements that actively resist hierarchy in their adherence to the specificity of singularity. I engage in a post-foundational ‘reading’ of identity politics in order to argue that one of the reasons we have yet to realize equality is related to an understanding of identity that has yet to fully embrace the ‘impossible.’ From here I discuss two other ways in which identity can be approached, drawing on examples from Derrida regarding identity and ‘self-difference’ and Nancy’s understanding of identity as an ‘act of becoming.’ In each case, we are forced at some point through our identifications to confront the impossible. Rather than seeking politics by retreating into the ‘self’ of a community, I argue that politics is instead located in the moment of this encounter. It paves the way for a ‘post-identity politics,’ which is not a messianic politics which claims that we might some day transcend identity and experience, nor is it a nostalgic politics which longs to reinstitute a “pre-identity liberalism.”208 Instead, we uncover what Rancière calls an ‘idiomatic’ politics, a politics of the ‘in-between,’ where the subject emerges in the space(s) between identifications.

What is created in this encounter is what Rancière calls a heterotopia, which for him indicates a space in which to encounter the other, specifically through the presupposition of

equality. Heterotopia is not a concrete ‘other’ topos that stands in opposition to another concrete topos (i.e., that of the self); it is the topos of the other as such, insofar as it is the place of the indeterminate. It is important to note here that for Rancière, this ‘other’ is not the absolute Other in the Lacanian sense, which stands in for “the unrepresentable, the unthinkable, the untreatable, the irredeemable.” The ‘other’ – the heteron – to which Rancière refers is instead that which is not exactly representable, thinkable or treatable within a particular distribution of places, identities and capacities. The ‘other,’ in other words, is not the culmination of a negation of sense or of a self; it is instead akin to a form of dissensus, what Rancière describes as “a difference between sense and sense,” where the other does not represent a conflict between who is counted and who is not, but instead a conflict about what it means to count. Rancière describes the political subject as ‘in-between’: “between several names, statuses, and identities; between humanity and inhumanity, citizenship and its denial; between the status of [worker] and the status of a speaking and thus thinking being. Political subjectivization is the enactment of equality […] by people who are together to the extent that they are between.” In other words, political subjectivity is constituted through the ‘crossing of identities,’ between those who take part and the part with no part.

*between presence and absence, hypotyposis*

Kant dedicates only a small portion of the *Critique of Judgment* to a discussion of the notion of ‘presentation,’ and understandably, therefore, the third *Critique* is often read as a

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209 Foucault also talks about heterotopia, perhaps most notably in the introduction to *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xvii-xviii. I return to the notion of ‘heterotopic spaces’ in greater detail in chapter 4.


discourse on art and representation. Yet aesthetic judgments, according to Kant, ultimately have to do with nature rather than art. In those sections where Kant does engage in discussions of art, he does so only in the context of its resemblance to nature. In this sense, we can see that Kant uses aesthetics as a means through which we try to control our experience of the world, or as a form of relation mediating interactions between ourselves and what we encounter ‘out there’ in the world. In a reading of the third Critique offered by Rodolphe Gasché, he argues that the key to understanding Kant’s notion of the aesthetic can be found in the distinction between *presentation* and *representation*. I would add further that this is not only a useful frame for our discussion of politics in general, but it is also the key to understanding the connections between aesthetics and identity, community and exclusion, and subject and supplementarity within this project.

To begin very simply, presentation does not perform the same function as representation. Kant’s use of the term presentation implies a *production*, as in, for example, the act of ‘realizing’ (that is, producing a representation of the possibilities of) a concept. Gasché singles out this particular meaning of the verb *darstellen* as production because he insists that it is related to Kant’s specific use of the term ‘presentation’: “presentation concerns concepts, and consists in rendering them intuitable, in a process that is subservient to cognition.” Presentation is directly a product of the relationship between the senses and the intuition. It is the form of immediate experience by which concepts are imbued with *reality*. Unlike representation, a term that Kant uses very broadly to designate the mode in which something is given to a subject through thought, presentation has a very specific and narrow meaning. Connecting this to my earlier discussion of the ‘distribution of the sensible,’

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213 Kant’s most direct discussions of presentation are found in S48-49 and S59 of the Critique of Judgment, 179-188, 225-230.
presentation occupies a kind of ‘middle ground’ between different forms of representation. Specifically, I mean that a concept is itself technically a representation, which is then presented or rendered intuitable through the interplay of sense and intuition, which we then see repeated elsewhere in the world in other forms as representations of it. Presentation performs a similar function to Heidegger’s notion of enframing or Rancière’s partitioning of the sensible insofar as it is an active and deliberate process through which the world becomes sensible and intuitable in a particular way.\textsuperscript{215} It is intimately bound up with the imagination insofar as it is an expression of the interplay between reason and understanding.

To link this to my discussion in chapter one, the concept ‘politics’ is realized through its presentation in immediate experience. We recognize certain phenomena as belonging to politics, and they in turn come to define its possibilities and limits. These possibilities and limits are then perpetually repeated and reinforced through representations: ideology, for example, could be said to be one such form of representation, in the sense that it is a repetition through which these newly framed and limited forms of experience are shown back to us and reinforced. Likewise, in the case of democracy, we recognize certain values as belonging to it, which in turn come to define its possibilities and limits. Given that politics does not exist in a bubble but is instead affected by the arrangement of social and economic forces with which it circulates at any given point in time, its possibilities and limits are constantly being reshaped through these interactions. For example, the emergence of modern capitalism required a particular political, technological, social and legal framework. It would not have been possible for capitalism to develop in the way it did without this gradual and nearly undetectable shift in our perception of the fundamental tenet of democracy from

\textsuperscript{215} I discuss ‘enframing’ in greater depth later in this chapter.
equality to freedom. The key to this entire process is that it appears to occur naturally and completely of its own accord rather than having been driven by other means.

Kant’s discussion of presentation, much like our discussions of the relations between politics and aesthetics, between politics and the political, and between identity and democracy, is focused upon its reality-producing function. Presentation is grounded in intuition, specifically in pure intuitions of time and space. Our a priori intuitions of time and space are, according to Kant, the very conditions of possibility for all experience and perception. Without presentation and its reality-producing function, there would be no cognition whatsoever.\textsuperscript{216} Kant uses the term ‘hypotyposis’ alternately with presentation (Darstellung) to describe “a figure characterized by the force of its illustrations, its synoptic qualities, its sublime connotations,” which contains all of the necessary elements to describe this reality-producing function.\textsuperscript{217} According to Gasché’s reading:

Hypotyposis is a mode of presentation that pictures things so vividly that they appear to present themselves; it also presents in entirety, and the moral grandeur or aesthetic spectacle that it provides is constitutive of a subjective reflection. Hence, what is presented in hypotyposis is endowed with reality, it is alive and self-conscious… it appears to present itself in person and completely by itself.\textsuperscript{218}

This articulation of the function of hypotyposis reaches far beyond its illustrative dimension. Though he doesn’t explicitly point to it, Gasché’s reading seems to suggest the possibility of an embodied imagination, albeit a rhetorical one, that has the potential to be both extremely

\textsuperscript{216} Ibid., 209.  
\textsuperscript{217} Ibid., 209.  
\textsuperscript{218} Ibid., 209. My emphasis.
dangerous and radically emancipatory. On one hand, hypotyposis effectively shapes reality precisely because its ‘illustrations’ are so life-like. As we are not altogether conscious of the processes involved in presentation, its life-like illustrations are what shape our perceptual reality. Moreover, insofar as it appears to self-present, it is often mistaken for reality in the sense that it appears to lay claim to an objective or universal existence that does not rely on human cognition. The danger, therefore, lies in this mistaken designation of an a priori status upon something that is actually a direct product of cognition and experience. It is the process by which ideology or ‘grand narrative’ is mistaken for empirical fact. On the other hand, an understanding of hypotyposis and its ‘reality producing function’ also reveals to us the essentially illusory and therefore subjective character of these kinds of representation. If we think of presentation as the orientation of meaning, then the possibility of reorientation is left open to us.

Mapping this discussion back onto identity formation and its impact on modern democracy, I believe that we can shed some new light on the latter. I argue that identification is primarily an aesthetic process, akin to hypotyposis. The constellation of signs and symbols that we gather together and ascribe to ourselves under the banner of identity through the process of identification are what Kant would call representations. I say this because our ability to claim any sort of identity for ourselves speaks directly to our powers of apperception and schematization. Though this sounds counter to Kant’s own argument that the subject is not a collection of representations, that is actually not exactly what I believe my argument implies. To argue that a subject is a collection of representations would be to argue that identity (as a representation of the self) is an ontological category, or at least that it has an ontological status, which I am most certainly not doing. Instead, I argue that while

Perhaps this ‘embodied imagination’ is the birthplace of the interject, whom I discuss at length in chapter 5.
identification is constitutive of the ‘reality’ of self-awareness, and perhaps even of the
relation between ‘self’ and ‘world,’ it is decidedly ontic, and moreover, entirely dependent on
that relation with an other.\textsuperscript{220} Representations do not produce self-awareness, they describe it.

The illustrations that result from the process of identification are both what we see as
constitutive of our ‘fixed’ categories of identification (race, sex, etc.), which are touted as
‘natural’ categories and thus appear to present themselves, and what enable us to see
ourselves as individuals in the first place insofar as that kind of subjective reflection requires
the ability to see one’s own identity presented in its entirety or as a whole. In this sense, we
can begin to draw connections to the ways in which liberal democracy, as it is centered upon
the individual, relies on this hypotyposis for its existence. Lyotard emphasizes the role of
hypotyposis in Kant’s thinking as well. In \textit{The Differend}, he argues that:

\begin{quote}
The historical-political makes itself present to the assertion [‘there is
progress’] only through cases, which operate not as exempla and still less as
schemata, but as complex hypotyposes, the more complex ones being the
surer. The popular enthusiasm for the Revolution is a very validating case for
the historical-political phrase, and thus allows for a very sure hypotyposis.
This is for the simple reason that it is itself a very improbable hypotyposis (the
recognition of the Idea of the republic in a ‘formless,’ empirical given).\textsuperscript{221}
\end{quote}

This notion that the more improbable hypotyposes are the most certain is very provocative.
The ‘very improbable hypotyposis’ to which Lyotard refers here is this: that in order to
mobilize support for the Revolution (or any Revolution), we must be able to recognize the
‘Idea of the republic’ as being actively unveiled through our participation, and that this

\textsuperscript{220} Where ‘ontic’ is understood as directly related to beings (existants) and ‘ontological’ is concerned with the
nature of Being (existence) itself.
\textsuperscript{221} Lyotard, \textit{The Differend}, 171.
unveiling be seen as ‘progress.’ The product of this hypotyposis is precisely this view that ‘there is progress.’ The Revolution is figured as providing the guiding Idea for a human community, that is, the ‘Idea of the republic,’ which in turn produces the order and unity through which the notion that we can see ‘progress’ happening becomes our subjective reality. It is in this way that we are able to gather the losses (usually massive losses of human life) and gains (usually material and minimal) together under one banner and see it all as part of ‘progress.’ This is arguably the same function that allows for the institutionalization of morality and organized religion in general, but more than this, I argue that this accurately describes the way in which nearly every political ‘reality’ is brought into being and sustained. The desired political configuration always provides a guiding Idea (grand narrative) for a human community, which through a collective hypotyposis acquires the status of empirical reality that we feel we are merely confirming rather than actively creating. Lyotard identifies a broader implication for this idea in Kant’s work when he adds, “as for the philosophy of history, about which there can be no question in a critical thought, it is an illusion born from the appearance that signs are exempla or schemata.”

It is here that we find at least one plausible answer to the question of how traditional democracy founded upon the Idea of equality has transitioned to its modern form, which is grounded instead in the (often) incompatible Idea of individual freedom. Put simply, it is this constitutive Idea – that is, our Idea of ‘the republic’ – that has changed. This is directly a result of the changing political landscape, where modern democracies are formed in this way because they have come to focus less on the politics of the social and more on the politics of the economy. This is not simply the result of the exercise of state power alone, as this would only work to delegitimize a democratic government. The strength required to radically alter

222 Ibid., 171
the order and unity belonging to a democratic system is located in its founding Idea. A democratic government is able to represent the people, and thus gain its legitimacy, only insofar as it is able to ground its authority in this Idea. This may sound like democracy produces a form of state authority that looks suspiciously like religious authority, and I argue that this is because it does. The democratic principle of the separation of church and state, though its purpose is to protect both freedom and equality, nevertheless opens up a gap in its wake that must ultimately be filled by the state itself. And what is the absence within which this gap is opened? I argue that it is the absence of the mode of presentation, that process through which sensible forms are given to Ideas, that space in which we navigate the relations between the freedom of the imagination and the constraints of material reality. This void and the requirement that it be filled in order for a government to function expose another of the deep connections between aesthetics and politics, in which we see that aesthetic judgments are a necessary feature of the appearance of legitimacy in political authority. Presentation not only allows us to construct the field of sensible experience itself in a particular way, it is also the process through which we construct the meaning of sensible experience. The claims to universal validity which are required to complete this process need not lay claim to any form of concrete universal existence; on the contrary, they require only that their ensuant representations be universally communicable and repeatable.

Rancière is widely credited with having inverted the traditional approach to the question of how aesthetics and politics relate to one another. Rather than searching for points of intersection between two separate, self-contained concepts, he instead begins from a position where politics and aesthetics are consubstantial (sharing an ‘essence’) as distributions of the sensible. In other words, politics and aesthetics together are the means through which a sensory framework is created and maintained in order to distinguish the
visible from the invisible, the sayable from the unsayable, the audible from the inaudible, or
put more simply, the possible from the impossible. In *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*,
Rancière writes that “art and politics are not two permanent and separate realities about
which it might be asked if they *must* be put in relation to one another. They are two forms of
distribution of the sensible, both of which are dependent on a specific regime of
identification.”223 This is probably the most fundamental thesis in Rancière’s work on politics
and aesthetics, and yet, according to Gabrielle Rockhill, it is one that Rancière nevertheless
constantly calls into question. Rockhill tells us that Rancière regularly reminds his readers
that art is *not* truly consubstantial with politics because it does not engender political
subjectivization, “that is to say, dissensual acts that disturb the hierarchies of the given
‘police order’ in the struggle to verify the presupposition of equality through the construction
of a *we*.”224

While Rancière’s genealogy of artistic regimes, the political systems with which they
have become synonymous, and the subject positions they create is undoubtedly one of his
key contributions to the discourse, for the purposes of this section I will focus upon the
significance of Rancière’s reading of Kant in order to shed some light on why and in what
ways the connections between politics and aesthetics are significant here. While Rancière
relies almost exclusively on Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* in this regard, I argue that his
critical analysis of the relation between aesthetics and politics can be further augmented by a
reading of the *Critique of Judgment*. While Rancière is of course justified in concerning
himself with the first *Critique* insofar as it deals in great detail with the conditions of
possibility for the world ‘as we know it,’ he seems to have passed over the opportunity to

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extend his analysis through the third Critique to that realm of sense that lies ‘beyond the limits of our understanding,’ which seems to me to directly align with the spirit in which his own work is undertaken. For example, Kant’s description of an encounter with the sublime is rich in its connections to the disruption of the partitions of the sensible by a distinct aesthetics.

Returning to Rancière’s definition of aesthetics, where he insists that aesthetics is not the science or philosophy of the beautiful or of art, he states simply that, “aesthetics is a re-configuration of sensible experience.”

In defining aesthetic judgment as an “activity of redistribution [… that takes the form of a neutralization,” Rancière calls upon the Kantian notion of the relation between the imagination and the understanding, namely that free-play that allows judgment to create representations that are in a sense beyond cognition. Of significance to our analysis here is Rancière’s distinction between aesthetic judgment and cognitive judgment: aesthetic judgment, he argues, “escapes the hierarchical relationship between a high faculty and a low faculty, that is, escapes in the form of a positive neither/nor.”

Put another way, though aesthetic judgments remain part of the process of cognitive subsumption, the imaginary representation does not come to be fixed under any one category. The aesthetic dimension is “another kind of relation between sense and sense, a supplement that both reveals and neutralizes the division at the heart of the sensible.”

Drawing a connection between Kant and Plato here, Rancière refers to this process as “the neutralization of the opposition between the faculties, the parts of the soul, or the classes of the population […].” Far from being a pacification, however, this neutralization represents...

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227 Ibid., 2.
228 Ibid., 3.
229 Ibid.
“the staging of an excess, a supplement that brings about a more radical way of seeing the conflict.”

The neutralizing power of the aesthetic dimension lies in the fact that it rejects the hierarchical set of relations that are established by the co-operation of the faculties, effectively creating a ‘dissensus,’ which is not a conflict per se, but a disturbance in and of the normal relation between ‘sense and sense,’ or between an object that presents itself as given and the sense that one attributes to it (through which it is signified). It is important to note here that Rancière does not equate aesthetic dissensus with a disconnect between ‘appearance’ and ‘reality.’ Instead, he writes, “it is a distance with respect to the reality/appearance [of] opposition itself, a way of restaging the very status of appearance or the very relation of the visible and the invisible.”

**ungrounding, disidentification, becoming**

In his book *Post-Foundational Political Thought*, Oliver Marchart defines post-foundationalism as a branch of political thought that is actively engaged in the “constant interrogation of metaphysical figures of foundation – such as totality, universality, essence, and ground.” Importantly, post-foundationalism is not aimed at the complete eradication of these figures, but instead at weakening their ontological status in order to underline the impossibility of a ‘final’ or absolute ground. Post-foundationalism is thus a theoretical framework that brings the endless play between grounding and groundlessness to the fore, emphasizing the roles played by contingency and supplementarity in our understandings of political and social phenomena. Though post-foundational politics still addresses the split between politics and the political, and thus association and dissociation, it does not build

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230 Ibid.
233 Ibid., 2.
these discussions upon ‘ground’ as we saw thinkers such as Arendt and Schmitt do in chapter 1. The political difference – that is, the difference between the terms ‘politics’ and ‘the political’ – is characterized by Marchart in the following way: “the political […] will never be able fully to live up to its function as Ground – and yet it has to be actualized in the form of an always concrete politics that necessarily fails to deliver what it has promised.”234 The retreat of the political (and its supplementary ground) at the moment of the institution of the social paradoxically leaves in its absence the very void that we attempt to fill with a final ground. Since this is impossible, what we uncover instead are akin to what Judith Butler called ‘contingent foundations,’ which here can be understood as the ensuing series of hegemonic attempts to ground society that are ultimately unsuccessful.235 My imposition of a post-foundational framework onto the critique of identity politics and, implicitly, a critique of certain understandings of political collectivity therefore does not aim at doing away with identity and/or community altogether. Instead, I argue that through a post-foundational lens, we can search for alternate forms of both subjectivity and collectivity that are not given in the constitution of subjects/communities grounded in ‘right’ identifications. I argue that these forms begin to take shape through disidentification and misrecognition.

Disidentification refers to the rhetorical practice through which one is situated simultaneously within and against the various discourses through which one is called to identify.236 Disidentification is, first and foremost, the experience of misrecognition. In Bodies that Matter, Judith Butler describes this experience as the “uneasy sense of standing under a sign to which one does and does not belong[…]”237 Butler sees disidentification as rife

234 Ibid., 8.
235 Ibid., 7.
236 http://enculturation.net/files/QueerRhetoric/queerarchive/disid.html, accessed December 21, 2016. This site offers an excellent example of the ways in which disidentification is mobilized in queer theory.
237 Butler, Bodies that Matter, 219.
with political possibility, insofar as this position ‘between’ identifications often allows one to generate or reveal other identifications that had previously been hidden or foreclosed upon in some way. José Esteban Muñoz is a queer theorist who is well known for his intensive work with disidentification, and he frames his own use of the concept in the following way:

Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and re-circuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture.\(^{238}\)

Muñoz focuses his analysis on cultural practices having to do with sexuality, specifically in terms of those labeled as ‘straight,’ ‘lesbian,’ or ‘gay.’ A great example of this process is the one used by Enculturation, of men’s fitness magazines whose pages are filled with scantily clad well-muscled men in an attempt to showcase a particular understanding of heterosexual masculinity, yet are at the same time objects of homoerotic desire.\(^{239}\) Muñoz’s own focus on queer rhetorical practice seeks to capture similar specific self-conscious interventions in discourses of normalized and normalizing sexuality. Muñoz’s work stands out as an excellent example of how the work of theorists such as Butler and Rancière can be used to illustrate and enhance our understandings of specific political phenomena. Muñoz aligns disidentification with certain strategies of resistance, mobilizing a similar rhetoric of

\(^{238}\) José Esteban Muñoz, Disidentifications (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 31.  
\(^{239}\) [http://enculturation.net/files/QueerRhetoric/queerarchive/disid.html](http://enculturation.net/files/QueerRhetoric/queerarchive/disid.html)
problematizing ‘right’ identifications that we have encountered in several places already in order to confront the ‘impossible’ other, rendering it/them visible, audible, thinkable and possible. I will further develop this notion of the space ‘between’ identifications as a space of political intervention in the following sections of this chapter, and it continues to figure centrally in chapter 5.

Disidentification is intimately linked to the movement of ‘becoming.’ Unlike ‘being’ (as a fixed, stable position), becoming does not point to a horizon of possibility for subjectivity as though it were an Idea that we must move towards (in either the Platonic or Kantian sense). This movement, like Derrida’s àvenir, is not a movement toward a stable or knowable future state of fixed being. Instead, becoming carries with it an ‘inoperative teleology’ that iterates the dislocation structuring the possibilities of becoming from within. Becoming points to a disruptive and potentially transformative possibility at the heart of this fluid subjectivity which in turn bears the promise of change in the here and now. Returning again to Derrida, I argue that we are already experiencing what could be considered the ‘first moments’ of this shift. For example, even though we claim to have ‘national identities,’ there is nothing that is universally essential to them. A fully realized national identity would require a three-way consensus: a consensus among citizens, a consensus within government, and a consensus between citizens and government, all of whom would be agreeing upon an identical and simultaneous notion of what that identity is. The realization of this national identity, then, would be dependent upon the disappearance of individual identities in particular, and of politics in general.

In The Other Heading, Derrida argues that every identity is structured by ‘self-difference,’ indicating that, for example, “there is no culture or cultural identity without this
difference with itself.” What Derrida says of culture is true of identity in general. A national identity, to continue with this example, differs not only from other national identities against which it defines itself negatively, but also differs within itself. One may be ‘Canadian’ in many different ways. Wayne Gretzky, Sir Wilfred Laurier and Emily Carr are all Canadians, but all they collectively represent about ‘Canadianness’ is that it differs within itself. To claim that their ‘Canadianness’ could be reduced to a single, homogeneous shared identity would necessitate all of the differences between them to be gathered together and effaced. This means that every reference or claim to an identity has to obscure the fact that no identity is ever identical to ‘itself.’ These differences constitute identity as a ‘divergence’ rather than as a ‘gathering.’

The fact that we nevertheless accept something like a national identity as a part of ourselves in spite of the fact that it requires us to surrender some of our specificity in that identification shows that we are capable of taking this first step. This demonstrates that we are able on some level to let go of certain particulars under certain circumstances in a movement toward something impossible.

The aim here is not to demonstrate a need to do away with identity, but to open politics to the possibility of ‘other’ identifications. While the identifications we form in relation to others, grounded in the particular, and those ‘transcendental’ identifications we make with the various metaphysical figures of foundation are certainly the most conspicuous, they are not the only modes of identification. Post-modernism’s exposure of the idea of a stable, coherent ‘self’ that is independent of culture, politics or society as an ideological construct has done surprisingly little to change our deep cultural, political and social

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241 This short discussion of Canadian identity as an example of self-difference is inspired by Niall Lucy’s discussion of masculinity in his entry entitled “identity” A Derrida Dictionary (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 52.

242 Ibid., 10.
attachments to this kind of identification. I side once again with Marchart here in thinking that this is at least in part due to the association of postmodernism with anti-foundationalism, which (whether or not it is actually the case) is believed to advocate the total absence of all grounds. It is not surprising, then, that this has been a difficult premise for many political theorists to accept, especially for those who may reject the notion of an a priori free moral subject yet nevertheless continue to believe that the subject still has a place in political theory. Post-foundational thinkers speak directly to concerns such as this, unworking the categories of subject, identity and community, but recognizing that we cannot do away with them completely.

Nancy’s understanding of identity as an ‘act of becoming’ offers a philosophical complement to Rancière’s call to reinvent politics through a particular mode of disidentification. In his short book Identity, Nancy writes that, “In the past, […] one did not speak of identity because it was indicated by signs. One speaks of it when there are no longer signs, or when they no longer refer to anything.” Through the rise of identity politics, we came to demand a means through which those who are excluded can be rendered visible and audible. It is becoming more and more clear, however, that recognition has become so bound up with the specificity of identity, or what Rancière calls ‘right names,’ that we no longer envision a universal recognition at the heart of emancipatory politics. Meaningful political action – to use Rancière’s language, action that would affect a redistribution of the sensible, disrupting the hierarchies of the police order – requires us to instead confront the unknown, the impossible. This, consequently, would require us to confront the fact that we cannot control or determine the outcome in advance, and thus the possibility that ‘I’ might not necessarily be better off in this new distribution, as well as the certainty that ‘I’ will not be

243 Nancy, Identity, 28.
the same ‘I’ in its wake. In the sage words of Forrest Gump, “you never know what you’re gonna get.”

The belief that an identity is something that one ‘is’ or ‘possesses’ is part of the process of stabilization through which we are ordered (and order ourselves) both socially and politically. According to Nancy, identity is an event of appropriation, but importantly, this does not happen just once, “but constantly, each time.”244 Furthermore, this act of appropriation entails an ‘exappropriation,’ because in this act, “there is never an established subject, already identified, to whom the appropriation would return.”245 In each act of appropriation, the subject is different, from others and from itself, and is constantly engaged in the process of overcoming its ‘identifiable identity.’ It is for this reason that Nancy concludes that identity can only be thought as the ‘intimate interior’ of the subject, more intimate to each person or group than any collection of identity markers.246 This means, among other things, that a government (or a ‘society’ in the broad sense) can never properly identify, and thus stabilize or institutionalize, the intimacies out of which its ‘people,’ its culture, or its communities are born, nor can it hope to discover what ‘other,’ possible forms these intimacies might take.247 There is what Nancy calls an ‘incommensurability’ between ‘subjective’ identity (related to peoples, cultures and communities) and ‘objective’ political identity that is obscured or covered over by the general idea of democracy. This conflation can be seen, for example, in the fantasy of the demos that speaks with ‘one voice’ – for example, in announcing an election result with, “the people have spoken…” Against this conflation, Nancy encourages us to strive toward a collective articulation of singular responses to shared concerns. Yet if the social field is a space of closure, of enclosure, of

244 Ibid., 41.
245 Ibid., 42.
246 Ibid., 42.
247 Ibid., 42.
hidden exclusions that are generated through the work of identity and consensus, how can we locate a space for staging this ‘collective presentation of singular responses to shared concerns’ that will resist, on the one hand, their coagulation into identity-based communities, and on the other, their absolutization? If our ontological condition is one of singular plurality, we seem to be as yet unable to incorporate this into our social configurations, into policy, or into any kind of sustained political experience.

(iii) Being-together In-between: Toward a ‘Post-Identity’ Politics

The presupposition of equality is, according to Rancière, the source and pre-condition of all politics.\(^{248}\) Working towards the realization of an emancipatory politics involves, first and foremost, the verification of the equality of ‘anyone with everyone’. Individuals cannot offer us direct experience of political reality, only hypotyposis (an approximation of reality that has been heavily conditioned by the social). Political subjectivization, on the other hand, is never the simple assertion of an identity; it is always, at the same time, the refusal of identity. Rancière argues that the business of assigning ‘right’ names that confine us to certain spaces and occupations has to do with policy, not politics. “Politics is about ‘wrong’ names – misnomers that articulate a gap and connect with a wrong.”\(^ {249}\) Politics is about misidentification. It opens a space for demonstration, and demonstration presupposes an other or others. This demonstration stages a ‘common place’ through which political subjects enact their equality and handle a wrong. Rancière therefore describes the political subject as emerging and circulating ‘in-between’: “between several names, statuses, and identities; between humanity and inhumanity, citizenship and its denial; between the status of [worker]

\(^{248}\) Rancière, *Disagreement*, 17.

and the status of a speaking and thus thinking being. Political subjectivization is the
enactment of equality [...] by people who are together to the extent that they are between.”

In this section, I explore in greater detail this notion of ‘crossing identities,’ between those
who take part and the part with no part, as an alternative to identity politics as it exists today.
In contrast to more extreme rejections of identity politics, which are not only problematic in
terms of their all-or-nothing attitude toward the absolute rejection of identity, but also in
terms of the extreme difficulty of actually practicing this kind of resistance, Rancière’s
approach via the presupposition of equality and the retention of identity as structuring the
space of resistance is both more practical and more readily practicable.

To return for a moment to the problems associated with identity politics that I touched
upon in earlier sections, what we see as its outcome is not a democratic mass movement, as
many would have hoped, but rather the extension of self-interested consciousness that
actually works to preserve the current police order despite the fact that activists are trying to
dismantle it. Through the isolation of these struggles against one another, for example, we
have witnessed among other things the creation of a hierarchy of the oppressed rather than a
true liberation. Part of the problem lies in the way in which equality has been translated
into policy in modern democracies as the ability to participate as a voter and as a consumer.
If this is what equality has become, then equality is not really at stake in most struggles, and
as a result, neither is collective action. According to Rancière, it is only the presupposition of
equality that produces a democratic political subjectivity “in the interval between two

\[250\] Ibid., 61.
\[251\] I am thinking here of Irving Goh’s ‘auto-reject’ as one such extreme example, which I discuss in greater
detail in chapter 5.
\[252\] For another perspective on how the ‘New Left’ has come to inadvertently reproduce many of the structures,
behaviours and attitudes that it had originally set out to challenge, see Richard J. Ellis, “Romancing the
identities... by playing on the double relation between the universal and the particular."\textsuperscript{253} The example he gives in this case is of women’s rights, where the universal side of their identity was determined under the very laws that denied them these rights, and the particular aspect of that identity was uncovered through the act of protest, demonstrating that since they could enact these rights, they in fact already possessed them.\textsuperscript{254} What has changed since then about identity politics and collective action that has so dramatically reduced its efficacy is an increasing inability to act on the presupposition of equality. We have come to see equality as a goal, rather than as the starting point.

The second more fundamental problem, as Todd May observes, is that acting from the presupposition of equality is, to put it simply, hard. In \textit{Contemporary Political Movements and the Thought of Jacques Rancière}, May argues that once we lose sight of the presupposition of equality, we also lose sight of the motivation for solidarity.\textsuperscript{255} He clarifies that there can still be collective struggle, of course, but that this struggle is not premised upon the presupposition of equality. Instead, “it is an alliance among those whose individual interests find a temporary convergence.”\textsuperscript{256} So while there is some solidarity and there are local struggles, what is lacking is the ‘glue’ that holds people together to form a democratic mass movement. May looks at the difficulty of acting from the presupposition of equality in light of the context of neoliberal globalization, and outlines what he sees to be two of the most prominent responses to this difficulty. First, he identifies ‘withdrawal’ as a widespread response, driven by apathy and hopelessness created by the feeling of being powerless to change the world.\textsuperscript{257} We feel powerless to defy institutions to which we have no access and/or

\textsuperscript{253} Rancière, \textit{Dissensus}, 57.  
\textsuperscript{254} Ibid., 57.  
\textsuperscript{255} Todd May, \textit{Contemporary Political Movements and the Thought of Jacques Rancière} (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 147.  
\textsuperscript{256} Ibid., 147.  
\textsuperscript{257} Ibid., 149.
make no contribution, so instead, the tendency is to pacify ourselves with consumer goods and withdraw.\footnote{258} The second widespread response that May identifies is described in terms of its resemblance to religious fundamentalism, a form of foundationalism, which \textit{fights} instead of pulling back, opposing neoliberal globalization with “a return to essential elements of a particular culture.”\footnote{259} What I want to draw our attention to is May’s conclusion about this second response, where he states that, “in this sense, religious fundamentalism is indistinct from other forms of identity politics that have characterized the left.”\footnote{260}

While sure to be controversial, what he is pointing to here is the fact that both identity politics and religious fundamentalism posit an \textit{essence} or ‘final ground’ that is asserted in resistance to the current order. While he acknowledges that there are some newer more progressive forms of identity politics that do not operate in this way, he argues that the vast majority of identity politics hold a particular element or collection of elements as their source of self-assertion, which could include reference to gender, race, class, or sexual orientation, for example.\footnote{261} Like religious fundamentalism, May argues that identity politics (even in its more progressive forms) establishes and poses its identity against the current police order. Despite their seemingly opposite trajectories, there is an underlying similarity between these two responses – identity politics and withdrawal – which poses a further problem for equality. In each case, solidarity is replaced by self-concern in the sense that what is at stake is ‘who I am’ or ‘what I want’ instead of shared equality.\footnote{262} This is the crux of Rancière’s rejection of identity in his democratic politics: the role of democratic politics is not to unify people under a particular characteristic or ‘essence.’ Its role is better understood in terms of

\footnotetext[258]{Ibid., 149-150.} \footnotetext[259]{Ibid., 150. May cites the examples of Islamic, Christian, Hindu and Jewish forms of religious fundamentalism.} \footnotetext[260]{Ibid., 150.} \footnotetext[261]{Ibid., 150.} \footnotetext[262]{Ibid., 150.}
declassification, whereby individual or collective desires and identities are stripped away and replaced by the equality of anyone and every-one.\footnote{263}

We can now return to what Rancière sees as lying at the heart of aesthetic experience in order to find a way to enact these singular/collective expressions. “Heterotopia,” he writes, refers to “a certain way of thinking the ‘heteron’ or the ‘other’: the other as the effect of a reconfiguration of the distribution of places, identities and capacities.”\footnote{264} What we are left with, in effect, is not the absence of topos (utopia, for example), but rather the topos through which these arguments are staged.\footnote{265} This topos is itself ‘neutral,’ not partial to any argument in particular, and remains open to ‘other’ arguments and other characterizations. To take another example, I argue that Rancière’s reconceptualization of democracy also constructs a heterotopia (which I believe was his intention), since it subtracts the form of democracy from the various topoi within which it is typically located, either as a form of government, a set of ideals and identifications embraced by a society or culture, a language of left and right, an object of social or moral esteem, etc. The construction of this heterotopia does not add yet another topos to these, but rather creates a space in which all of these locations and oppositions are neutralized. In this neutralization, Rancière ‘determines a space for the indeterminate’: he determines a space within which the ‘part with no part’ can come to take part through the presupposition of their equality, a space for the collective presentation and articulation of singular responses to shared concerns.\footnote{266}

In an article written for *October* entitled “Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization,” Rancière argues along similar lines that the cause of the current ‘dead end’ of political reflection and action is “the identification of politics with the *self* of a community.”

This happens in both large-scale communities, under the banners of universality, Law, or liberal democracy, for example, and smaller-scale communities through claims of identity made on behalf of minorities against the hegemony of the ruling culture (what we have come to call identity politics).

What unites these claims, according to Rancière, is that they all stem from the same ‘questionable identification’: namely, that the ‘selves’ of these communities are identified as stemming from politics, where it is actually policy that shapes them. Policy claims to act as the ‘self’ of the community, turning “the techniques of governing into natural laws of the social order,” but, as Rancière notes, “if *politics* is something different from *policy* [which, he argues, it is], it cannot draw on such an identification.”

Since emancipation is defined by Rancière as the process of verifying the presupposition of equality, emancipation is therefore by definition ‘selfless,’ not just in the moral sense but also in a logical one: “the politics of emancipation is the politics of the self as an other.”

Working towards emancipation involves, first and foremost, the verification of the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being; this is the politics of ‘the self as an other.’ We can think of it in this way: politically speaking, the ‘self’ cannot offer us direct experience of reality, but rather only an approximation of reality as it has been shaped and conditioned by the social. Political subjectivization is never the simple assertion of an

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268 Ibid., 59.
269 Ibid., 59.
270 Ibid., 59.
identity, but is always, at the same time, the denial of an identity given by an other through the operation of policy (policing). “Policy is about giving ‘right’ names that pin people down to their place and work. Politics is about ‘wrong’ names – misnomers that articulate a gap and connect with a wrong.” Politics opens a space for demonstration, and demonstration presupposes an other or others. This demonstration stages a ‘common place’ through which political subjects can stage equality and handle a wrong. Rancière describes the political subject as an ‘in-between’: “between several names, statuses, and identities; between humanity and inhumanity, citizenship and its denial; between the status of [worker] and the status of a speaking and thus thinking being. Political subjectivization is the enactment of equality […] by people who are together to the extent that they are between.” It is a ‘crossing of identities,’ between those who take part and the part with no part.

This ‘crossing of identities’ involves what Rancière calls an impossible identification, which is an identification that cannot be embodied by the person who utters it. Rancière offers us the example of one such ‘impossible identification’ in the 1968 refrain, “We are all German Jews,” through which that process of subjectivization found its name in a crossing of identities: on one hand, “We are all German Jews” is a ‘wrong’ identification (they were not all German Jews), and on the other, it is an identification with the denial of an “absolutely essential wrong.” The process of equality (that is, the presupposition and demonstration of equality) is a process of difference, but this difference does not refer to the assumption of a different identity or to the various dissimilarities among identities. The ‘self’ of an individual or group is not the place for the staging of difference. Instead, Rancière argues, the place for staging difference is the “topos of an argument,” and the space in which such an

273 Ibid., 61.
274 Ibid., 61.
275 Ibid., 62.
argument can unfold is the place of the political subject, that interval or gap where we can be  
*together in-between*: between identities, cultures, names, and so on.\textsuperscript{276}

In order to clarify this point, Rancière offers a mini-critique of metapolitics, which he  
defines as “the interpretation of politics from the vantage point of policy.”\textsuperscript{277} Given that  
policy is concerned with the assignation of ‘right’ names, it cannot cope with gaps and has no  
place for heterology. Rancière locates the paradigm of this approach in the 1789 *Declaration  
of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, specifically in the ways in which the distinction  
between these two terms is made. The current style of metapolitics teaches us that the  
categories of ‘man’ and ‘citizen’ are concurrent, embodied in the liberal individual who  
enjoys the universal values of human rights that are guaranteed in our democratic  
constitutions.\textsuperscript{278} Rancière’s politics of emancipation offers a different interpretation. He  
argues that the universality of the *Declaration* is actually the universality of the argument  
about the distinction between ‘man’ and ‘citizen,’ which was created in the gap or interval  
between the two terms. This gap is constitutive of the very possibility of “appealing from one  
to the other, of making them the terms of innumerable demonstrations of rights, including the  
rights of those who are counted *neither as men nor as citizens.*”\textsuperscript{279}

It is in the light of this third interpretation that we, alongside Rancière, can draw a  
conclusion that is both pessimistic and optimistic. On one hand, he concludes that the  
emancipatory politics that was unfolding in 1968, in which the heterological logic of ‘wrong’  
names produced the slogan, “We are all German Jews,” has collapsed and left a void, which  
is now full to overflowing with ‘right’ names. The emancipatory politics of today is bound up  
with the self and with increasingly specific identifications that insulate the self from the  

\textsuperscript{276} Ibid., 62.  
\textsuperscript{277} Ibid., 62.  
\textsuperscript{278} Ibid., 63.  
\textsuperscript{279} Ibid., 63. My emphasis.
other, and thus in Rancière’s view, it is neither political nor emancipatory. One of the consequences he identifies is a resurgence of racism and xenophobia, specifically aimed at the figure of the immigrant. Although he was writing about France in the early 1990’s, this will nevertheless resonate loudly in North America today. Arguably, the key to Trump’s success thus far has been his ability to locate the object of fear on the body of the other and translate that identification into policy. Rancière argues that identity is, first and foremost, about fear: “the fear of the other, the fear of nothing, which finds on the body of the other its object.” The politics of emancipation – the politics of the self as an other – provides a means of mitigating that fear. The outpouring of racism and xenophobia, such as we have witnessed throughout and as a result of the recent US election, is indicative of the collapse of politics, forgoing the opportunity for the political handling of a wrong in favor of the fostering of a ‘primal hate.’

In November 2016, Slavoj Žižek published an opinion piece in which he argued that Trump was ostensibly the lesser of two evils. He was in no way encouraging people to vote for Trump; instead, he was asking us “to approach coldly the question: Whose victory is better for the fate of the radical emancipatory project, Clinton’s or Trump’s?” At the time, I was unwilling to approach that question ‘coldly,’ but I have asked myself several times since then, was he right? Though perhaps a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ is too reductive an answer, I am inclined to answer both yes and no. No, because his victory will mean obstacle after obstacle for equality and thus also for emancipation. But also yes, because these obstacles themselves provide opportunities for us to exercise this presupposition. In late January, 2017, for

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280 Ibid., 64.
281 Ibid., 64.
283 Ibid.
example, an impossible identification came to the forefront of American politics: an identification with those asylum seekers from the seven countries against which Trump issued an order barring their entry to the US. Though the people who participated in large-scale protests in reaction to this order could not directly identify with those effected by the ban, they identified with the denial of an essential wrong. What’s more, these protesters also questioned their identification with the “American people” in whose name the order was passed. Following Rancière’s line of thinking, they acted as political subjects “in the interval or the gap between two identities, neither of which they [could] assume.”284 They presupposed the equality of those who were targeted by the ban, appealing to the universality of the argument about the distinction between ‘man’ and ‘citizen,’ and making them the terms of a demonstration of rights, which in this case, was about the rights of those who were being counted ‘neither as men nor as citizens,’ people who were instead classified under the ‘right name’ (via policy) of ‘potential terrorists.’285 Like any example, however, it has its problems, not least of which is that those who were the actual subjects of the ban had no opportunity to act from the presupposition of equality other than to risk their lives and those of their families by entering the country illegally.

This, believe it or not, leads us into Rancière’s more optimistic conclusion. He explains that politically, we are confronted with a distinction between a logic of subjectivization and a logic of identification, which is a distinction “between two ideas of multiplicity”: the ‘tribal’ and the ‘idiomatic.’286 The tribal, associated with policy and identity, constructs the universal in such a way that it claims to speak for the ‘self’ of a

286 Ibid., 63.
community (i.e., ‘the people’). The idiomatic, on the other hand, is associated with politics and disidentification, being ‘in-between’ identities. Idiomatic politics constructs the universal precisely in this space ‘between,’ the place for the demonstration of equality. It does away with the problem that is central to tribal politics of having to choose between the big community and the smaller ones, or between community and nothing at all. Idiomatic politics, according to Rancière, leads instead to a new politics of the ‘in-between.’ Unlike identity politics, through which groups who are struggling against oppression can become isolated from one another and further alienated from the big community, a collective struggle that is grounded in the presupposition of equality works to undercut identities, hierarchies and orders. This does not mean that various identity groups would have to give up those communities or practices which have been formed in the name of solidarity and support, but only that we can not build a politics solely upon those identities. A politics that is built upon the presupposition of equality actively resists inequality by confronting the historical legacies that construct certain groups as inferior and by resisting inequalities within the existing order. In closing, we can return to Nancy and his assertion that, “the true consistency of a subject is the overcoming at every moment of its identifiable identity.”

The ‘intimate interior’ of the subject, that ‘unidentifiable identity’ that constitutes the subject, is, I believe, this intimacy of the self as an other, of the crossing of identities. It is the intimacy of equality.

**The Inappropriable Subject**

Although I return to this subject in great depth in chapter 5, I would like to introduce it here for two reasons. First, the notion of a subject who cannot be appropriated by the One follows naturally from the discussion and critique of the politics of identity and totality

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287 Ibid., 63.
outlined in the first two chapters of this project. Returning for a moment to the modern position that holds that ‘everything is political,’ the notion of an inappropriable subject represents a radical break with modernity. Nancy argued that the idea that everything is political essentially describes an attitude toward ‘man’ as self-sufficiently producing his own nature and, through that, nature as a whole. According to Nancy:

> Until now, the vague representation of this self-sufficiency and this self-production have entirely dominated the representations of politics (be they from the ‘right’ or the ‘left’), or at least all of those representations that appear under the banner of a global, political ‘project,’ whether it be ‘pro-state’ or ‘anti-state,’ ‘consensual’ or ‘revolutionary,’ etc.

The only issue raised by the so-called ‘crisis’ of politics today, he continues, is hence “that of the self-sufficiency of man and/or of nature in him and by him.” The inconsistency of this self-sufficiency and self-production, however, seems to become more evident as time goes on. Nancy argues that this is the case because the increasingly global impact of democracy – that is, the globalization of the polis itself – reveals quite clearly how unnatural, insufficient, and unproductive he is. This concept of ‘man’ is thus revealed as lacking identity, propriety, end, measure, and most crucially, being. On one hand, the dispossessed are, in many cases, written out of existence through the construction of the social realm in a particular way. On the other hand, those who are able to take part are always aware that this ability, nor its denial to others, actually produces ‘human-being.’ Politics, as Nancy

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290 Ibid.
291 Ibid.
292 Ibid. This therefore also reveals the ‘non-naturalness’ of nature itself, as it was produced by man.
293 Ibid.
294 Chapter 4 of this project is dedicated to this practice.
295 Ibid., 19.
argues, has therefore “been withdrawn as giveness […] of a common essence and purpose: it has been withdrawn as a totality or as a totalization. In this sense, not everything is political.”

The second reason for introducing the notion of an ‘inappropriable subject’ here is because in the following chapter, I deal with the what we might call the ‘inappropriable subjects of democracy’: freedom, equality, and community. Specifically, I ask after the implications for our understanding of politics (more specifically, of democracy) if we agree with Nancy that politics must now be understood as “the specific site of the articulation of a non-unity – and of the symbolization of a non-figure.” Liberty and equality, for example, would therefore have to become empty names under which we maintain the impossibility of locating an essence – for politics, for justice, for incommensurability – in order for politics to become “a site of detotalization.” At the risk of getting too far ahead of myself, the reason I mention this facet of inappropriability is to argue that politics, if it is to become a site of detotalization, must maintain strong ties to a particular understanding of singularity. It must also be acknowledged as antithetical to ‘identity’ (insofar as identity can never be singular). If we are to resist the pull of totalization, our understandings of what constitute politics and, by proxy, political subjectivity, must be intimately bound to the singular. In my opinion, this is precisely the attitude that is shared among the thinkers with whom I have chosen to engage throughout this project – especially Nancy, Derrida, Rancière and Badiou – in the thinking of politics and subject through the event.

There is a strong (some might say necessary) connection between singularity and inappropriability. Though Derrida had already written a great number of things on the topic

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296 Ibid.
297 Ibid., 21.
298 Ibid. My emphasis.
of singularity, it wasn’t until the late 1990s that the full significance of this work came to the fore. In a piece titled “Deconstruction and Feminism,” Peggy Kamuf effectively explains this significance as it relates to our understanding of the subject:

We began by asking what it might mean [...] to affirm the inappropriable subject. One thing is already clear: it could not mean a simple evacuation or negation of the “I” as an instance of the inscription of difference. Rather than that of the subject, however, this instance would be that of a singular force of insistence, a singularity. Singularity is not the subject, which as we have seen, is but the possibility of a repetition. The singular is not repeatable as such, but is precisely the impossible presentation of an “as such.” The singular remains in excess of – before or beyond – representation, the difference between the subject and an unrepresentable I. The latter [singularity] is finite, determined by the singular events of birth and death, whereas the former [the subject] is infinitely or indefinitely repeatable, having no origin nor end other than in that repetition. The notion of the singular cannot, by definition, be accommodated by any generality.

The affirmation of the inappropriable subject, therefore, is not merely a negation of the Cartesian subject (or the subject of identity). The singular refers to that aspect of the subject that is beyond representation; that element that cannot be appropriated, and thus also cannot be fully understood or reproduced. Kamuf goes on to argue that the political is always a struggle for appropriation: the appropriation of an other for the sake of movements of liberation, for example, whether these are inspired by the right or the left. To return to our discussion of the notion that ‘the personal is the political,’ Kamuf would argue that this

attitude represents the impulse to attempt to appropriate singularity as subjechthood.\textsuperscript{301} The experience of being appropriated in this way is alienating insofar as one might feel that anything that is unique about them is systematically categorized and claimed as social property in the name of an ideological principle or activist cause. Kamuf writes, therefore, that there is an “uncertain limit, by definition highly divisible and unstable, [that] cannot therefore reliably set off the political from the personal; it cannot fix the point at which the freedom of individual choice and the right to be free from political constraint is posed unconditionally.”\textsuperscript{302} From her perspective, then, the personal is systematically politicized through these acts of appropriation. This subject cannot be singular because it has been appropriated through its identification. The question we are thus left with, and to which I will return in chapter 5, is: is the inappropriable subject possible? The answer, of course, is no: the inappropriable subject can only ever be impossible.

The aim of this chapter has not been to demonstrate a need to do away with identity, nor is what follows a scathing critique of the fundamental ideals of modern democracy through which these identities are made possible. My purpose is instead to expose the interconnectedness of these two levels of identification: the identifications we form in relation to others which are grounded in the particular and those ‘transcendental’ identifications we make with universal ideals in order to more closely align ourselves with them. These aren’t two separate identifications on the side of the particular, on one hand, and of the universal, on the other, but rather they are two facets of an otherwise unified process of identification. For example, a closer examination of what we call ‘individual’ rights exposes the fact that our own are inextricably linked to those of others. Postmodernism’s exposure of

\textsuperscript{301} Ibid., 121.  
\textsuperscript{302} Ibid.
the idea of a stable, coherent ‘self’ that is independent of culture, politics or society as an ideological construct has done surprisingly little to change our deep cultural, political and social attachments to this kind of identification. In what follows, I propose the underlying argument that our unwillingness or inability to let go of these kinds of identifications can be mapped onto our current understanding of sovereignty and its relation to human agency. Specifically, I locate the heart of this issue in the changing relations between liberty, popular sovereignty and state sovereignty within modern democracies, where the principles of equality and fraternity upon which democracy was founded have been largely replaced by the principle of individual freedom. This notion is the basis for my work in chapters 3 and 4.

If we can accept a thinking of the political subject that is no longer rooted in the experience and action of an individual but in a collective interpellation, we must not forget that our understanding of collectivity has to shift as well. We leave behind the thinking of collectives in terms of ‘unities,’ where we are joined as a ‘whole’ or totality. In a sense, each concept – subject and collective – has been turned on its head. Singularity now belongs to collectivity in order to prevent totalization; political subjectivity is premised upon a notion of being-with that precludes the individual from laying claim to it. Coming back to the first chapter of this project, the notion that ‘the personal is the political’ is, in one way or another, also turned on its head by each of the thinkers upon whom I have focused here. In replacing the individual a priori subject as the ‘speaking subject’ of politics, we also problematize the notion of what it means to speak as part of a group. In the commonly held understandings of subject and community, a subject can only begin to speak as a member of the community (identity group) after s/he has declared her own identity as implicit in the creation of that space in which she can speak as part of the group. What I have identified as perhaps the most problematic part of this process is the hierarchical imposition of a set of limits regarding who
has the right to speak as a legitimate representative of a particular group, when, and what about. The act of taking up a speaking position, then, is both enabled and constrained by the limits of identity itself. The rejection of political subjectivity as grounded in the individual forces us to confront the possibility that the lived experience of a subjugated identity cannot (on its own) provide the ontological ground for experience. This issue is taken up again in chapter 5, specifically in terms of what it means to take up a speaking position within the context of the collective political subjectivity we have begun to discuss here.

We have inherited a problematic méconnaissance and/or mésentente between the culture of liberation that is associated with identity politics and the interpretation of democratic ideals associated with the State.\footnote{Misunderstanding and/or dissensus.} What this boils down to is a fundamental incompatibility between the ‘promises’ of democracy (freedom, equality, fraternity) and state sovereignty (which demands protection against external threats). In order to change the stakes of this relation and reorient ourselves toward the ‘truth’ of democracy (or political subjectivity, or community, or freedom, or equality, etc.), I argue that we must first learn to recognize the critical instabilities that exist in the structure of identity politics, and then we must enact a means of correcting those instabilities. We have been offered several ways in which this process can begin by the thinkers I have discussed here, the most pressing of which unanimously involves a re-thinking of the social: the deconstruction of social ontology, the articulation of a radically different form of social ontology (such as being-with), the political negation of the social, and an acknowledgement of the founding violence of the social.

For each of our thinkers, the problem of the social is primarily a problem of ‘essence’ or ‘final ground.’ The larger tension that I have been attempting to stage here is the tension
between, on one hand, what I believe to be the necessity of thinking experience in terms of ‘becoming,’ and on the other, that becoming cannot be presented – which in this case means both (returning to Kant) that it cannot be given ‘sensible form,’ and, as Derrida and Nancy would agree, that it cannot be performed as ‘presence.’ This focus on ‘becoming’ that we are offered here shifts the stakes of what has been perhaps the biggest question in radical political thought up to now: if we accept ‘becoming’ and being-with as the ontological grounds for experience, we are no longer debating the necessity of overcoming ‘essence’; we are instead trying to negotiate the problem of how to work with an impossible essence that is at once unbearable and necessary – this is the political aporia of the social. Yet, one cannot ‘overcome’ aporia. Instead, we must constantly be looking for ways of working between these impossibilities in order to open ourselves to the possibility of something radically unfamiliar.
…we write of “democracy to come”, “democracy of the uncounted”, “democratizing sovereignty”, “democracy workshops”, “pluralizing democracy” and more. Berlusconi and Bush, Derrida and Balibar, Italian communists and Hamas – we are all democrats now.

But what is left of democracy?

- Wendy Brown, “We Are All Democrats Now”

Chapter 3: Senses of Democracy – Liberté, (et/ou) Egalité

Arguably, the most powerful and contested feature of modern democracy has less to do with its actual empirical existence and more to do with its affects: we can think of this in terms of the ‘democratic promise.’ Our collective devotion to the idea of ‘ordinary’ people uniting to engage in self-governance, where the distribution of power directly reflects the sovereignty of ‘the people,’ where the universality of democratic ideals such as freedom and equality reigns uncontested, and where everyone is enveloped in the loving embrace of the community appears to be interminable, even while the empirical realities that democracies present consistently fall far short of this promise. We make apologies on democracy’s behalf with qualifiers such as, ‘transitional,’ ‘partial,’ ‘consolidation,’ ‘pseudo-,’ etc., which together construct a familiar teleology concerning the narrative of perfectibility. Therein lies the heart of this promise: although actually existing democracies are fraught with imperfections, Democracy – as a perfect Idea, made up of a set of perfect ideals – carries with it the promise of future perfectibility, if only we could get it right. Although I will leave aside for now the various critiques and elaborations of this teleology, I return to discuss this
The central problem that I address in this and the following chapters can be framed as follows: Is true democratic universalism possible, or does democracy necessarily entail exclusions? In this chapter, I explore this question in direct relation to the problems presented by the tensions within and between the concepts of freedom and equality as they are universalized and institutionalized in the practice of democracy. In the following chapter, I engage community and fraternity in much the same way. My conclusion is obvious from the outset, given the thinkers alongside whom I have built these arguments: democracy indeed does depend upon exclusion as much as it does the rhetoric of inclusion. I use these chapters (3 and 4) to explicate this conclusion, justifying it in and through the work of my post-foundational entourage. What I contribute to this discussion becomes clearest in chapter 5, where I argue that despite the fact that hundreds of dissertations could be written on the depoliticizing and dehumanizing effects of this dependency upon exclusion, I seek to uncover the possibility of a new subject position and perhaps along with it an alternate understanding of politics that are themselves dependent upon this exclusion, the absent center of totality.

Building upon my discussion of the relation between identity and community in the previous chapter, I address in chapters 3 and 4 what came to be the most notable slogan of the French Revolution: ‘Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité, ou la Mort.’ With widespread recognition of the French Revolution as the founding event of modern history (that is, modern democratic history), it is not a big stretch to argue that this slogan adequately captures democratic identity itself. In the early 1940s, Carl Schmitt famously referred to freedom, equality and fraternity as democracy’s ‘watchwords,’ and arguably, this remains the

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304 Among the most obvious of these commentators on the notion of a democratic teleology is Derrida, but the following text offers a good overview of others who may be less obvious: Jean Grugel, *Democratization: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).
case today. Working through the first two of its individual concepts – liberty and equality – I examine these aspects of democratic identity each in its own right, then in terms of the ways in which they intersect and disrupt one another, in their partial combination in concepts such as sovereignty, freedom, right, equivalence, etc., then finally in terms of their often problematic relations to the concept and operation of democracy itself. As with any identity, the slogan was presented as a coherent totality, standing in for an ideal future whose arrival was believed to be immediately imminent. When we examine these ideas as they are taken up in contemporary theory, specifically in certain works by Derrida, Nancy, Rancière and Badiou, we can identify what I view as a common thread in their analyses: namely, the notion that in each case, there is a point at which our ability to live democratically – that is, by the concepts through which modern democracies are defined – demands a transcendence of or movement beyond our practical understandings of those concepts. This chapter is focused upon liberty and equality, while chapter 4 deals with fraternity, community and the democratic promise for which ‘ou la mort’ is called to stand in.

Right away we are forced to confront an impossible question: what is Democracy? But then, what are we really asking here? What do we mean by Democracy? What does it look like? How do we do it? Already, we have coaxed out a few of the problems that make this question so fraught: connections (and disconnections) between democracy and meaning, between the Idea of democracy and our experience of it, and between democracy and aesthetics. What we are asking after are its ‘senses’ in the fullest sense of the word, a complete understanding that captures its ontological, phenomenological and aesthetic dimensions and presents them to us in the form of a practice of governance by and for the people. And already again we confront another question stemming from this definition: who,

or what, are ‘the people?’ Even in modern democracies, the answer to this question involves a complex set of criteria, which themselves include a complex series of rules and exceptions.\textsuperscript{306} In other words, we are still grappling with this question, and I outline this problem in the following chapter’s section on \textit{Fraternité}.

Taking things a step further, in “We Are All Democrats Now…” Wendy Brown asks why it is the case that in parts of the world where democracy has long been established, the people are not ruling themselves.\textsuperscript{307} She is quick to point out that there is no historical or etymological origin for the assumption that “representation, constitutions, deliberation, participation, free markets, rights, universality, or even equality” are in any way innate to democracy.\textsuperscript{308} Instead, the only claim that democracy contains is that ‘the people’ \textit{as a whole} (no a part, nor an Other) rule themselves and are politically sovereign.\textsuperscript{309} She argues that democracy is, therefore, an ‘unfinished principle’:

\begin{footnotes}
\item[\textsuperscript{308}] Ibid.
\item[\textsuperscript{309}] Ibid.
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[…] it specifies neither what powers must be shared for the people’s rule to be practiced, how this rule is to be organized, nor by which institutions or supplemental conditions it is enabled or secured. […] even as theorists from Aristotle, Rousseau, Toqueville, and Marx through Rawls and Wolin argue (differently) that democracy requires the maintenance of precise conditions, rich supplements, and artful balances, the term itself does not stipulate any of these. Perhaps this is another reason why contemporary enthusiasm for democracy can so easily abjure the extent to which its object has been voided of content. 310

This argument is not hers alone; it is also the focus of Deleuze’s analysis of Kant’s moral Law in Coldness and Cruelty, as well as Žižek’s reading of said analysis in The Ticklish Subject. 311 If I may superimpose Žižek’s discussion of moral Law into this discussion about Democracy, where the capital ‘D’ carries with it the notion of the democratic Idea or ‘truth,’ it would go something like this: ‘Democracy is thus not merely an empty form applied to a random political content in order to ascertain if this content meets the criteria of democratic adequacy – the empty form of Democracy, rather, functions as the promise of an absent content never to come. This form serves to highlight rather than minimize the enduring uncertainty about the content of our acts, especially with regard to rule: we never know if we have actually acted in accordance with Democracy and have not been guided by ulterior political motives.’ 312

310 Ibid. Original emphasis.
312 Original passage: “The Kantian Law is thus not merely an empty form applied to a random empirical content in order to ascertain if this content meets the criteria of ethical adequacy – the empty form of the Law, rather, functions as the promise of an absent content (never) to come. This form is not the neutral-universal mould of the plurality of different empirical contents; it bears witness to the persisting uncertainty about the content of our acts – we never know if the determinate content that accounts for the specificity of our acts is the right one, that is, if we have actually acted in accordance with the Law and have not been guided by some hidden pathological motives.” Žižek, The Ticklish Subject, 365.
Modern (liberal) democracies nevertheless claim to have several more requirements than simply the rule of the people, including first and foremost a constitution, which makes certain guarantees to every individual person and must be upheld at the levels of government and citizens: basic human rights, separation of powers, certain freedoms, a certain level of equality, and some concept of ‘good governance.’ Although these ideals are indeed presented as guarantees, the promise of universality ‘from above’ is impossible to fulfill. We must believe that they belong to us, that they exist in a tangible, meaningful way, and that it is possible to expect that our governments and fellow citizens will constantly work to ensure that this is our collective political reality in spite of the fact that we see evidence to the contrary all around us. I have chosen to employ the slogan of the French Revolution because I believe that its history is particularly illustrative of this disconnect, and because that history also lays bare – arguably for the first time, but certainly not the last – the impossibility of achieving true democratic universalism. This disconnect between the universal guarantees made through democratic constitutions and the reality of our collective inability to fulfill them universally, if I may take a brief Lacanian detour here, represents a lack at the heart of democracy, the empty center of democracy around which any ‘democratic project’ can only circle. This bundle of universal guarantees that are so fundamental to modern democracies – most notably human rights, equality and sovereignty – functions, like the Lacanian phallus, as a phantasmic, non-existent ‘thing’ which is nonetheless decisively constitutive of real political and social effects. The impossibility of realizing these guarantees at a universal level, even within a defined territory, has had little effect on our faith in the promise of democracy to do precisely that. The status of the ‘universal guarantee’ as a negative object, as the fundamental promise upon which the system is constructed but is impossible to fulfill,
drives me to agree that, in a certain sense, Democracy does not exist.\footnote{Alongside Wendy Brown, other critics share this sentiment regarding the disconnect between what democracy actually is and what we imagine it to be, including big names such as Rancière, Laclau and Žižek, but many other commentators in diverse contexts, including Brett Levinson, “In Theory, Politics Does Not Exist,” \textit{Postmodern Culture} 18, no. 1 (September, 2007) https://muse.jhu.edu/ (accessed April 8, 2018); Jodi Dean, “The Democratic Deadlock,” \textit{Theory & Event} 10, no. 4 (2007) https://muse-jhu-edu.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/ (accessed April 8, 2018); Emilio Allier Montaño and Peter Bloom, “The Closed Promise: The Authoritarian ‘Grip’ of Democracy,” \textit{Theory & Event} 17, no. 3 (2014) https://muse-jhu-edu.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/ (accessed April 8, 2018); and Antonio Y. Vázquez-Arroyo, “Democracy Today: Four Maxims,” \textit{Theory & Event} 13, no. 2 (2010) https://muse-jhu-edu.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/ (accessed April 8, 2018).} That is, \textit{Democracy is politics in the form of the impossible.} Despite the impossibility of Democracy (as a self-contained, internally coherent, closed concept) itself and the fundamental loss we experience through its guarantees of universality, we undoubtedly live by what I characterize as a democratic \textit{aesthetic.} Specifically, I return to aesthetics as a form of relation, a mediator between particular phenomena, our sensuous experience, and the concepts that structure our understanding of them, which acknowledges that these concepts carry with them a dimension of dislocation, misrecognition, or incoherence. For example, although equality does not refer to any particular system or organization, it nevertheless provides a frame into which we place certain socio-political phenomena and structures that we deem to be egalitarian. Democracy enacts a complex ‘unity at play’… And isn’t this play necessary in order to attempt to avoid thinking being-together in terms of choosing \textit{either} democracy \textit{or} totalitarianism as we have for centuries? The opening to other possibilities that we are offered by many contemporary thinkers pushes us to confront and theorize a politics that is both alive and bound up with an irreducible, heterogeneous, differentiated form of unity – a unity without totality; being-toward-another yet remaining irreducibly singular – a solidarity that is perpetually engaged in its own undoing, effectively allowing us to overcome those threats of totalitarianism that haunt our now antiquated philosophies of the One. Readers of Nancy frequently refer to a ‘community without unity’ when discussing this work, so is it possible to rethink democracy
in a similar way? Is any form of a ‘politics without totality’ possible? I argue that thinking a politics without totality involves, on one hand, the necessity of recasting unity as a form of ‘sense,’ and on the other, building upon notions such as unworking and autoimmunity, preventing unity from becoming identical to itself.

It is important to note here that I am not arguing that the ideals associated with democracy - freedom, equality, community, sovereignty, human rights – are themselves somehow controversial in principle. On the contrary, it seems reasonable to assert that these are all but universally accepted in some form. What I believe remains open for discussion is the politics that follows from them, the disagreements about how to clearly define them, how to prioritize them, what limits (if any) to place on them, and how to bring them into effect. What I lay out below is a discussion of the tensions between the symbols of our movement toward unification (equality, democracy and community) as well as our resistances to it (identity, liberty, sovereignty, difference). I examine these tensions primarily as Rancière, Badiou, Nancy and Derrida theorize them, in order to get a glimpse of what kinds of exchanges are taking shape between political subjects and the subjects of politics at the fringes of contemporary political theory. Those examples taken up in what follows – liberty, equality, community and, more broadly, democracy itself – each depend, in some way, on a mode of being-together which is only really accessible as a form of intersubjective exchange or reciprocity through those forms of representation, such as language and visibility, that serve to mediate the relation between concept and sense, or between experience and ‘truth.’ Rather than simply reordering power relations between existing orders of identity and intersubjective exposure to one another, the disruptive forces at play here (in whichever form that intervention may take – event, aporia, politics, unworking, etc.) aim to cut across these orders, working to introduce new subjects and heterogeneous objects into the field of
perception, doing away with traditional hierarchies and aiming at new forms of social and political organization.

(i) Senses of Freedom: Liberté, Sovereignty and De-democratization

In the foundation of modern democracies, much more emphasis has been put on freedom, and relatively little on equality.\(^{314}\) Returning for a moment to Rancière, we can recall his argument that in order for the political community to become a reality, it must be founded upon equality. Furthermore, the equality upon which it is founded must be radically different from forms of economic and juridical equivalence and notions of the common good that have traditionally acted as its placeholders.\(^{315}\) Even the \textit{a priori} categories of freedom and justice will not suffice. The “fundamental miscount” with which he argues politics is primarily concerned comes to be revealed when political freedom is revealed to be merely the \textit{appearance} of freedom, an empty property that serves mainly to limit equality to its “arithmetical” form in which wealth is “immediately identical with domination.”\(^{316}\) This freedom, which is supposedly ‘proper’ to the demos, can only be defined in the negative. Thus, it comes as little surprise when, in Rancière’s second example of miscount, he reveals that the demos itself is also negatively defined in terms of a \textit{lack} (of wealth, of virtue), an “undifferentiated mass” which is nevertheless said to be free like the rest.\(^{317}\) In other words, the poor are told that they are as free as anyone else to amass wealth, that the government

\(^{314}\) It is reasonable to claim that this prioritization of freedom over equality is the result of an enduring right-leaning influence, but this is certainly not the only factor.\(^{315}\) Rancière, \textit{Disagreement}, 7.\(^{316}\) Ibid, 8.\(^{317}\) Ibid, 8.
must not stand in the way of that freedom, yet the responsibility to ensure an equality of opportunities to do so falls outside the scope of government.

In this section, I begin by differentiating between concepts of freedom, liberty and sovereignty in order to clarify what kinds of freedom are made available through democracy. I argue that liberty and sovereignty are practical freedoms readily available for democratic governments to offer in a variety of forms, yet the philosophical concept of freedom plays an even more important role. Though not on offer itself, freedom circulates ‘behind the scenes’ as it were, in the form of a promise: on one hand, it is the promise of a ‘freedom to come’ which gestures toward a future perfectibility that we often ascribe to the practice of democracy; on the other hand, it is the promise of the violence, oppression and chaos that most certainly awaits should we choose to abandon democracy. Within this analysis I also explore the tension between freedom and equality that every democracy has to grapple with eventually, which is a tension that both threatens and bolsters its legitimacy as a system. In this respect, I also touch upon Derrida’s discussion of the autoimmune relations between democracy and sovereignty and between equality and freedom as he outlines them in Rogues, where he sees radical possibility coming out of these irresolvable tensions rather than political stalemate. Finally, I turn to Wendy Brown’s arguments about the erosion of sovereignty in her work on de-democratization in order to steer the discussion toward three accounts of political agency – Brown’s own, contrasted by that of Sharon Krause, who offers a more optimistic account. The third account brings us back to the philosophical account of freedom offered by Nancy, who views freedom as an act rather than something that can be given. Akin to Rancière’s understanding of equality, freedom for Nancy is not a goal of political action; it is the act itself. Freedom is an open-ended becoming, a disruptive and transformative possibility driving agency, which could be the very thing that allows us to

It is not difficult to see how the constitutive Idea associated with democracy could be undermined and reoriented, given that democratic ideals are often found to be in contradiction with one another, as is often said to be the case with freedom and equality. I would like to begin here by highlighting some key distinctions between freedom, liberty and sovereignty.\footnote{\textsuperscript{319} Though my focus here is on the philosophical aspects of freedom as ontology, one interested in a more broad discussion of the distinction between freedom and liberty should see: Isaiah Berlin, \textit{Two Concepts of Liberty}, (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1958), who uses ‘freedom’ and ‘liberty’ interchangeably; and Felix E. Oppenheim, \textit{Dimensions of Freedom: An Analysis} (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1961), see esp. 3-23, 67-89, 211-228, who makes a distinction between the two concepts. See also Efraim Podoksik, “One Concept of Liberty,” \textit{Journal of the History of Ideas} 71, no. 2 (April, 2010): 219-241, who offers a historical overview of the concept of liberty.} I tend to think of freedom as a philosophical condition, whereas liberty and sovereignty are better described as political conditions.\footnote{\textsuperscript{320} Put another way, we could view freedom as an ontological condition and liberty as an ontic one (in the Heideggerian sense). Though I do not advocate for a strict separation between philosophy and politics, I believe that this distinction is useful in introducing the different orientations of these concepts.} Though they are not necessarily opposed to one another, and indeed overlap in many ways, I believe that there is a certain transcendental character that belongs to freedom that is not present in our conception of liberty. Liberty presupposes a community, whereas true freedom, put very simply, is the absence of limit. If freedom is the absence of limit, then it must also be a-social. Freedom cannot be \textit{given} to someone because the imposition of another’s will would act as a limit to that freedom. Furthermore, an external body such as the State cannot grant freedom because freedom belongs to the ontological realm as a form of ‘pure’ relation. Liberty and sovereignty, on the other hand, are created through and rooted in constraint. Liberty and
sovereignty are diluted forms of freedom that are contracted to a people via external constraint, that is, typically by the State through Law. They are, therefore, paradoxical forms of freedom that are borne out of limitation: a kind of ‘Freedom-Lite.’ They are paradoxical in the sense that these ‘freedoms’ depend upon the Law as their condition of possibility. Liberty and sovereignty don’t exist outside the Law; therefore we could conclude that freedom belongs to anarchy, and liberty and sovereignty to government.

A further distinction between liberty and sovereignty, though not as strong or high-contrast, nevertheless ought to be made. First, I use the term sovereignty to designate popular sovereignty. I do not think in terms of ‘personal sovereignty’ here, because I believe that this is already captured under the umbrella of individual liberty. Very loosely, we can think of popular sovereignty as a form of collective political freedom and liberty as a form of personal freedom, though there can be no strict separation between them. Where sovereignty seems to be directed ‘outward,’ bearing a connection to the exercise of political power, liberty is generally more inward looking, toward self-determination or self-ownership.

Modern democracies promise both, though sovereignty is largely contained within electoral rights and liberty has been packaged up with capital and our ability to exercise free choice within the market. We can return to Kant here as a jumping-off point to see this metamorphosis in a simple way. Although freedom – as an actual lived experience – is unknowable to the thinking subject, through Darstellung (sensible presentation) the concept “freedom” is rendered sensibly present in the forms of liberty and sovereignty. Through liberty, we attempt to represent freedom in actually existing phenomena, qualified in terms of a ‘freedom to’ or a ‘freedom from.’ Through popular sovereignty, we represent freedom in the form of a relative collective autonomy, that is, the right to self-govern under certain circumstances within a set of externally opposed limits.
Democratic political systems were traditionally aimed at unification, between the people with one another and with the State, and the role that liberty and sovereignty play in this process is formative of what we have come to understand as the meaning of the word ‘democratic.’ Is the primary purpose of democracy to establish and protect liberty, thus making self-government secondary or subordinate? Or is its purpose primarily the establishment of a democratic system of governance, with the belief that liberty is the result? Although the idea of democracy was initially founded upon a principle of [sovereignty?](rule of the people by the people for the people), the promise of modern democracy as it was ushered in by events such as the French and American Revolutions, is premised first and foremost upon the principle of liberty. Thanks to the legacy of the social contract proposed by Rousseau, we paradoxically sacrifice a condition of ungoverned individual freedom in order to gain collective political power, but we do this in order to realize our individual liberty. In modern democracies we willingly forget the full meaning of the promise of rule by the people, supplementing and weakening it with a demand for individual liberty. Wendy Brown describes this paradox perfectly where she quips, “only democracy can make us free because only in democracy do we author the powers that govern us.”

The narrative that Derrida weaves throughout his arguments in *Rogues* is that democracy is governed by what he calls the ‘logic of autoimmunity.’ He uses this idea to describe gestures of self-preservation that also become means of destruction. To cite an example relevant to democracy, this can refer to the self-critique which is fundamental to a democratic system yet also contains the potential to be its undoing. Derrida locates this autoimmune logic in two primary relations: first, in the relation between democracy and sovereignty; and second, in the relation between equality and freedom. With regard to the

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321 Brown, “We Are All Democrats Now,” 52.
322 Derrida, *Rogues.*
first, Derrida suggests that in order to establish the ability to rule effectually, democracy (understood in its classical form as the rule of the people) must necessarily rely on some form of sovereignty. Without it, the power granted to the people would inevitably be appropriated by some other power, thus replacing democracy with another system of governance. In an attempt to protect itself, therefore, democracy must contain and limit sovereignty by closing off, unifying and creating a ‘general equivalence’ of that very multiplicity through which democracy is made possible in the first place. It is in this way (and for this purpose) that ‘the nation’ and ‘the people’ are created, and along with the formation of a heterogeneous unity come, as we have seen already, the resultant and inevitable exclusions. These excluded parts thus come to embody that autoimmunity to which Derrida refers, posing a constant threat to that sovereignty upon which the political community is constructed and attacking the community’s supposed ‘immunity’ from otherness and difference.323

The problems that stem from the necessity of placing limits upon sovereignty and containing it within a political community lead us to Derrida’s second account of democracy’s autoimmune logic in the equally problematic relation between equality and freedom.324 The role of equality in democracy is to guarantee each agent within the community equal value, which requires the creation of a degree of sameness or general equivalence. This pertains most notably to the guarantee that each eligible member of the community gets one equal vote. Like sovereignty, equality necessitates its own limitation within a particular community in order to be allowed to have its desired effects and retain its meaningfulness. Freedom, as an expression of singularity, constantly exceeds the

323 This discussion is a summary of Derrida’s discussion: Ibid., 13-18.
determination of sameness or equivalence upon which equality depends, yet Derrida argues that freedom paradoxically also relies on a second concept of equality in order to be meaningful.\textsuperscript{325} Specifically, he suggests that in order for freedom to be realized in this context, it must have its effect in relation to those limits imposed upon it by others. Thus Derrida describes “several unequal kinds of equality”: the first is characterized as calculable, referring to its manifestations in a general equivalence of ‘worth’ and/or ‘right,’ and the second is figured as “an incalculable and incommensurable equality, […] the unconditional condition of freedom, its sharing[.].”\textsuperscript{326} Equality and freedom are therefore intrinsically bound and mutually dependent, yet this relation is also autoimmune. Through equality, each singularity is incorporated into a measurable calculation through which specificity is effaced and subjects become infinitely interchangeable. Through freedom, the insulating force of this calculation is ruptured, (re)establishing a heterogeneous relation of each singularity to the other. This tension is captured and exacerbated in democracy, where freedom must take place in the context of “the incalculable equality in a freedom that is alike for all […] living beings who are assumed to be free, that is, equally endowed with freedoms, who are, incommensurably, incalculably, unconditionally equal in their freedom.”\textsuperscript{327}

Derrida’s exploration of democracy has two interrelated objectives. The first, which I have summarized above, can be viewed as an inquiry into the conditions of possibility for democracy, through which Derrida uncovers at least two key aporias among those concepts that are central to its existence: between democracy and sovereignty, and between equality and freedom. As a result, we must be critical of any and all proclamations that democracy has been realized and/or perfected in any currently existing regime or set of practices. His other

\textsuperscript{325} This discussion, as above, it a summary of Derrida’s discussion: Rogues, 21-25, 48-49.
\textsuperscript{326} Ibid., 49.
\textsuperscript{327} Ibid., 49.
objective, that of thinking democracy in terms of the democracy to come, is accompanied by a call for disruption, intervention, resistance and transformation in the here and now that would open democracy to new horizons of possibility. It is the logic of autoimmunity within democracy that opens these very possibilities. I will address the second of Derrida’s objectives in his engagement with democracy in chapter 5. Here, I will dwell a little longer on some of the echoes of this idea of democracy as being ‘at war with itself.’ In the context of this section, I will examine some further conceptualizations of the relationship between freedom and democracy, as well as the related problem of how to conceive of agency in the midst of this tension. To this end, I will begin by working through the example of a modern phenomenon that Wendy Brown describes as ‘de-democratization.’

Perhaps none of the other core democratic Ideas has become more distorted in and through the lived experience of democracy than freedom. The mechanisms of capital in particular have effectively bound ‘freedom’ to the freedom to pursue wealth and the freedom of the market. I do not believe that one has to identify as a Marxist in one form or another to see that we have gradually eroded the very possibility of popular political rule through the displacement of sovereignty out of the hands of the people and into the market. Brown posits that it is due to the onslaught of neoliberalism as a political rationality that we have witnessed “the state reconfigured from an embodiment of popular rule to an operation of business management.” This erosion of popular political rule finds additional contributing causes in forces beyond the market and neoliberal rationality. Brown rightly further identifies a juridical connection, where the power and reach of the courts have been extended to touch political decision making at both the domestic and international levels, especially with regard

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328 Brown, “We Are All Democrats Now…” 47.
to social movements and human rights issues.\textsuperscript{329} There has been a concurrent shift within the courts themselves from performing a \textit{limiting} function in deciding what is prohibited toward performing a prescriptive \textit{legislative} function in deciding what ‘must be done.’\textsuperscript{330} This juridification of politics certainly works to further undermine democracy, but this story would not be complete without mentioning the roles of globalization and securitization.

Globalization, by its very definition, stands for the erosion of state sovereignty. When states continue to insist upon their status as agents in the face of this waning sovereignty, Brown identifies two chief consequences: first, that the necessary political ‘form’ of democracy is lost; and second, that states ultimately abandon all pretense of carrying out the will of the people.\textsuperscript{331} In the case of the first, democracy requires a sovereign territory, either real or virtual, within which collective power is organized and upon which that power is exercised. Democracy unleashed from its bounded sovereign jurisdiction becomes politically meaningless and incoherent and is gradually replaced by “postnational and transnational fields of political, economic and social power.”\textsuperscript{332} In the case of the second, in abandoning the democratic imperative of representing and protecting the will of the people, states effectively become \textit{rogue} states where the people are reduced to “passive stakeholders in governmentalized states operating as firms within and as weak managers of global order of capital without.”\textsuperscript{333} Turning to securitization as the final cause of the erosion of state and popular sovereignty that we will discuss, Brown first points to the fact that this is often mischaracterized as a resurgence of state sovereignty. The resultant entity, what she terms the “security state,” answers the waning and contestation of state sovereignty “with a range of

\textsuperscript{329} Ibid., 48.
\textsuperscript{330} Ibid., 48.
\textsuperscript{331} Ibid., 49.
\textsuperscript{332} Ibid., 49.
\textsuperscript{333} Ibid., 50.
inadvertently de-democratizing policies,” most of which we are currently bearing witness to in modern democracies such as the United States and Britain, “from suspended rights of movement and information access to racial profiling to increased zones of state secrecy and permanent undeclared wars.”

Thus de-democratization comes to us in two forms: first, as either the cause or a symptom of the gradual disappearance of sovereignty; and second, in the form of an explicit and possibly even necessary unfreedom that belongs to democracy in both theory and practice. If this is indeed true, then the modern assumption that freedom is a universal human desire and thus the source of democracy’s legitimacy is flawed. Brown argues that it is the birth of the a priori free moral subject in modernity that has imbued democracy with its status as the only legitimate form of politics in the West, and yet it is the “white, masculine, and colonial face of this subject [that] has permitted and perpetuated democracy’s hierarchies, exclusions, and subordinating violences across the entirety of its modern existence.”

In her book Freedom Beyond Sovereignty, Sharon Krause advocates a need to rethink the idea that agency is best conceived as a kind of personal sovereignty, as self-determination or control over one’s action. Citing Hannah Arendt, Krause argues that we tend to conflate agency with sovereignty, but that the aspiration to sovereignty in this form actually threatens the very idea of freedom upon which it is based. The rise of our modern (liberal) notion of sovereignty occurred simultaneously with the rise of the modern state, where the latter is defined through its capacity to exercise control over both territories and populations. According to this understanding, a state is sovereign to the extent that no external entity has the right to determine what happens within its domain. According to the

334 Ibid., 50.
335 Ibid., 52.
337 Ibid., 4.
predominant liberal thought of the time, the individual ought to be understood, at least in principle, in more or less the same way. The presence of a rational will bestowed upon the individual the capacity to master itself in both conscience and action, and the equal moral status of persons meant that s/he had no natural obligation to obey anyone else (other than the state, of course, in the interest of social coordination).\(^{338}\) As a result of this liberal inheritance, we tend to take for granted that the sources of agency lie in the faculties of reason and will, or of power and right, combining a rational capacity for control over one’s own actions and a normative claim about the right to such control.

Krause urges us to be sceptical about this view, first and foremost because it fails to capture core features of how human agency actually works:

Agency properly conceived is the affirmation of one’s subjective existence, or personal identity, through concrete action in the world. To be an agent is to have an impact on the world that one can recognize as one’s own. Agency thus has both an efficacy side and an identity side. The efficacy side is what distinguishes agency from mere willing; you are not an agent if you do not act so as to affect the world. You are still a human being, but not an agent.\(^{339}\)

Agency is not an exclusively internal capacity of the person. It is deeply connected to certain faculties that are internal to the person (will, belief, desire) but it is not reducible to them. Agency is the capacity through which these faculties are activated, but it also has a strong teleological dimension that is not present in something like free will, for example. Whereas free will is by definition undetermined, agency bears a deep connection to ‘ends.’ Moreover, where free will is tied to individual behaviour, agency is a shared human capacity, both insofar as it refers to a collective historical dynamic and as it is by no means an ‘individual

\(^{338}\) Ibid., 4.
\(^{339}\) Ibid., 6.
Put another way, something like free will depends upon the a priori free moral subject as its actor, whereas agency has far more wide-reaching possibilities that are not limited to an individual subject. Krause takes this idea of agency as a shared human capacity a step further still when she argues that agency is not simply a pre-condition for action but can also be *created* or enhanced through association with others. The “constitution of many actions – as embodying both the agent’s personal identity and her effects – depends as much on other people as it does on the agent herself.” Krause argues that this feature of agency often goes unseen, especially by those who belong to a privileged group. She explains that:

> When social perception consistently functions to sustain one’s agency, as in the case of the privileged, it disappears from view, generating the illusion of personal sovereignty. Where social perception is systematically denied, as among the marginalized, its role in sustaining agency comes into sharp focus.

When I read this, I see strong echoes of what Rancière has written regarding the ‘part with no part.’ To briefly reiterate, Rancière argues that this element of society describes those who

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340 For example, we can speak of things like ‘state agency’ or see associations as having the capacity for agency.
341 Ibid., 6.
342 Ibid., 7.
343 Ibid., 7.
are not counted, not heard, not seen and for whom others presume to speak. Since political systems are organized around those who are counted, the constitutive role of social perception in establishing this agent-status is concealed. In this sense, there is a fundamental misrecognition at the heart of our notion of personal sovereignty whereby we fail to recognize our counted status as contingent upon social perception, imagining instead that each individual possesses an intrinsic authority and power to determine his or her own socio-political destiny through their ability to participate within the existing political situation.

Krause argues that the role of social perception in this process only becomes apparent when we turn our attention to those who have been dispossessed of agency, as in Agamben’s figure of *homo sacer* where those who inhabit the ‘state of exception’ are nevertheless still tied to the juridical order and to sovereign rule, the uncounted or marginalized ‘part with no part’ is not simply set ‘outside’ the law. To carry this analogy a step further, Agamben’s argument that juridical order is created, validated and maintained in relation to the exception (for example, in relation to ‘that which is not order’) resonates in both Rancière and Krause insofar as the existing social order, along with its ‘counted’ parts and the illusion of personal sovereignty generated within it, is dependant in an identical way upon its relation of exception.\(^\text{344}\)

Adding a final layer to this account of sovereignty, it is because we are frequently the agents of outcomes we did not foresee or wish to bring about that we are forced to recognize that agency often exceeds the limits of personal control and extends *beyond* intentional choice. It is on this basis that Krause is able to argue that the exercise of agency is, in fact, a *non-sovereign* experience. Agency, then, is not solely an inner faculty of the individual, but

is an emergent property of intersubjective exchanges. In other words, agency is by definition a relation: a mode of being-toward-another. Does thinking agency in this way uncover a previously hidden or severed connection to freedom? Do we gain greater access to something like freedom when we think of agency as a shared human capacity rather than merely the pre-condition for action at the individual level? I believe that this could be the case. We have already discussed some of the ways in which freedom gets ‘lost’ in a sense in its constitutional forms, and this is at least in part an effect of its being tied to and limited by the a priori free moral subject. In this context, freedom depends upon liberty and sovereignty for its material existence, yet as subjective properties, liberty and sovereignty can only ever hint at freedom. Perhaps a deeper understanding of what freedom is, detached from or at least prior to the a priori free moral subject upon which democracy’s legitimacy has been established, could shed some light on this notion of a non-sovereign form of agency and its potential impact on our thinking of democracy.

Freedom continues to present us with a seemingly insurmountable difficulty: to truly understand freedom, we are required to free ourselves of all of the ideas through which we understand it. Nancy’s *The Experience of Freedom* is undeniably an investigation of freedom with particular regard to its ontological status, and to dive to deeply into that aspect of his inquiry would drive us far afield of the scope of this particular discussion. There are, however, several moments in his analysis through which we can orient this discussion toward those questions that will structure the rest of this project. Nancy questions how we can understand freedom in the absence of anything like a ‘first cause’ (Idea, God, etc.) or a self-causing, a priori subject to guarantee it. In the absence of any such form of necessity, he wonders specifically how we can relate to and answer “the free call to freedom” instead of

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continuing to revel in “the self-sufficiency and self-satisfaction of a liberal, even libertarian, individualism” that is seen to be the effect of modern notions of subjectivity. \(^{346}\) In order to truly answer this call to freedom, Nancy insists that rather than focusing exclusively on making new laws or establishing a new ethics around freedom, “above all, what is incumbent on us is an absolute determination, an absolutely originary, archi-originary determination of ethics and praxis – not a law or an ultimate value, but that by which there can be a relation to law or to value: decision, freedom.” \(^{347}\) What this amounts to is a shift in our understanding of the ‘nature’ of freedom from thinking it as a property of the individual toward understanding freedom as the condition out of which the possibility of existence itself is opened. The philosophical task that Nancy identifies as being posed by the problem of freedom is thus that of investigating the ontological conditions that make freedom possible, and upon which any possible politics of freedom depends.

Nancy draws a line between political forms of freedom and its philosophical form. What we universally recognize as ‘political freedom’ is understood, on one hand, in terms of liberty as a natural, innate, pre-political property that belongs to the individual, and on the other hand, in terms of sovereignty as the right to self-govern which is bestowed upon the individual by the state. Freedom figured in this way involves a further reduction, in the form of what amounts to a juridical calculation that allows each individual to mitigate the freedoms belonging to others. Nancy’s philosophical approach to freedom runs starkly counter to this material figuration of freedom as a property, right or relation to others. Instead, he writes:

\(^{346}\) Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, 34.
\(^{347}\) Ibid., 163.
In and through ethical, juridical, material, and civil liberties, one must free *that through which* alone these liberties are, on the one hand, *ultimately possible* and thinkable, and on the other, capable of receiving a destination other than that of their immanent self-consumption […] Freedom perhaps designates nothing more and nothing less than existence itself.\(^{348}\)

Put more simply, Nancy argues that being in possession of these liberties is not itself constitutive of a condition of freedom; we cannot ‘ground’ our understanding of freedom in our consumption of its by-products, just as Rancière would argue that we cannot ground our understanding of equality in something like the right to equitable treatment under the law. Nancy argues instead that there is a freedom *prior to* the subject that is the very condition of possibility for subjective freedom. As such, it undoes in advance the notion of a form of freedom that is immanent or essential to the subject such as individual liberty. In other words, this freedom that precedes the subject is not a property *of* the subject. Nancy argues that “freedom can in no way take the form of a property, since it is only *from* freedom that there can be appropriation of anything – even of ‘oneself.’”\(^{349}\) The subject is granted its freedom only through this prior freedom, which s/he can only subsequently appropriate *as if* it were a subjective property.

We can see more clearly here the rationale behind Nancy’s assertion that freedom is not a *thing* that can be given, granted or possessed. Freedom is an *act*; it can only be performed. So what are we to think about those ‘rights and freedoms’ that we are granted through our democratic constitutions? Are we to believe that these freedoms are meaningless? Nancy addresses this question in the very beginning of this text where he writes, “*[F]reedoms* do not grasp the stakes of ‘freedom.’” They delimit necessary

\(^{348}\) Ibid., 13-14.
\(^{349}\) Ibid., 70. My emphasis.
conditions of contemporary human life without considering existence as such.”

Although he is highly critical in much of his writing of the notion that ‘universal human rights’ are the solution to every problem, it would be a mistake to assume that he rejects the notion of rights altogether. In a much more recent text, he addresses the question of ‘right’ and its connection to freedom in a clear and direct fashion:

The force of the form called ‘right’ resides in an act that is in the process of enacting a freedom of all and of each as a universal sharing, which is at work in such a sharing — and not just occupied with delimiting the spheres of free wills to protect one from the others. In other words, rights enact an active freedom, creative not only of community but also, more radically, of freedom. Right is freedom creating itself indefinitely. That is to say, creating a world, that is the same thing.

Nancy’s sense of ‘right’ must be distinguished from its traditional juridico-political form. The latter form of right is always bound up with the state, where the state has the right to govern and grant rights to its citizens. Bearing a strong connection to our discussion of liberty and sovereignty above, this traditional sense of right creates individual subjects who, as a result of their possession of these rights, are able to appeal to that government through the law. Nancy’s understanding of right, not unlike his understanding of freedom in this respect, cannot be given or imposed by a power and does not contain a legal quality.

Moreover, it does not contain a pre-determined essence of humanity or a legal demand that would reveal to us its ‘proper’ form. Instead, Nancy writes that right figured in terms of the ‘rights of man’ is not given, and that it is “neither acquired nor natural; ‘right’ is not defined,

\[350\] Ibid., 2.
\[352\] Ibid., 17-18.
and ‘man’ has no essence. Both, individually, are in act, in the process of making themselves. Nancy therefore sees the concepts of ‘rights’ and of ‘human’ as demands, which, much like freedom, when shared, become acts of rupturing the already-given sense of the world. To connect this to an earlier discussion, rather than being fixed categories of identity or agency, as they are traditionally figured, ‘human’ and ‘rights’ are both dynamic concepts which are realized through each act in a different way, exposed as being perpetually in the process of becoming. It is through our demand for rights that we create a world of freedom, and this freedom is given precisely in the act of creation. Far from being an absolute or stable concept that is somehow driving this creation, right is itself created through each demand.

Although we see here that our traditional fixed understandings of ‘human’ and ‘right’ and correspondingly of ‘identity’ and ‘agency’ are problematized (if not done away with altogether), this does not mean that there is no role for identity and agency in Nancy’s formulation. In my earlier discussion of what kind of new understanding of identity we might need in order to affect a revolution or radical redistribution of the sensible, I came to a similar conclusion. Becoming, as we can recall, does not point to a horizon of possibility for subjectivity. To infuse becoming with a teleology such as this would, on the one hand, preclude any kind of encounter with freedom and, on the other, would bar concepts such as ‘human’ or ‘right’ from their status as being in act (each time singular) and in the process of making themselves (freely re-creating themselves). In the final phase of his analysis of freedom in The Experience of Freedom, Nancy orients his discussion toward the question of political freedom. In this analysis, freedom is figured as both a founding and a revolutionary force. Freedom opens space by permitting “the reopening of the framework and the liberation

353 Ibid., 18.
354 Ibid., 18.
from every establishment, or its overflowing, by freedom in its *each time* irreducible (re)beginning: this is the task of politics as the liberation of freedom, as the (re)opening of the space of its inaugural sharing."³⁵⁵ This means, for example, that each shared demand contains the potential to rupture the already-given sense of the world through this spacing which freedom makes possible. It would mean effectively closing off *becoming* from the “each time irreducible (re)beginning” that freedom brings to it.³⁵⁶ Instead, *becoming* carries with it the ‘inoperative teleology’ that I have proposed, a teleology that is marked precisely by this “*each time* irreducible (re)beginning,” whose most vital consequence is that of a conceptual shift in replacing ‘ends’ with ‘possibilities.’ This inoperative teleology iterates precisely this dislocation that structures the possibilities of *becoming* from within. *Becoming* points to a disruptive and potentially transformative possibility at the heart of each demand for identity and/or agency, which in turn carry the promise of change in the here and now.

Freedom, as we have seen in the way it is figured by Nancy, is not something that can be appropriated, distributed or ruled, either by the subject or by a government. It cannot be reduced to an outcome or an effect of acting in a particular way, and it cannot be bestowed upon a subject from the ‘outside.’ It is not reducible to liberty or sovereignty because it is prior to politics and prior to the subject, and, as such, cannot be fully captured by them. In attempting to qualify, confine or limit freedom by attributing it to a particular materiality, we put ourselves in danger of losing sight of it altogether. On the other hand, we can see that to argue that freedom and politics or freedom and the subject are somehow mutually exclusive is to cut ourselves off from the radical potentialities that freedom’s potential to *open* can offer to us and to politics. My question now becomes, does equality work in a similar way?

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 79.
There is an undeniable connection between freedom and equality in Nancy’s formulation of the connection between freedom and right as I have outlined it above, in terms of the demand being an act of ‘universal sharing.’ But equality reaches back further still. Nancy understands equality, like freedom, as emerging at the level of ontology, prior to the emergence of the subject and of politics. Also like freedom, according to Nancy, equality does not refer to a determinate property, quality or capacity. Rather, equality is an ontological fact and a central feature of what it means to be ‘Singular Plural.’ It would seem then that equality is not something we can possess, but rather something to which we are exposed.

If this is the case, however, then we are forced at some point to confront the growing feeling of political impotence that an ontological account of freedom and equality such as Nancy’s produces: even if we are able to accept that the touchstones of our subjective and political realities (identity, equality, freedom, etc.) are better understood as acts of becoming rather than being static elements within a larger structure of fixed meaning, what are we to do with that knowledge? How does one enact a becoming? While Nancy’s ontological orientations of concepts such as freedom, equality and community certainly contain the conditions of possibility for a politics to unfold, how are we to actually go about carrying out political action that is not dependent upon the model of an a priori, autonomous, self-sufficient subject? With regard to freedom, we have seen that Nancy’s answer is that we undertake the task of politics – the ‘liberation of freedom’ – through a collective demand, since it is through this demand that we are exposed to the ‘sense’ of freedom. We cannot ‘have’ freedom, for reasons I have already discussed at length, but we are capable, through this demand for right (that is understood always in terms as a becoming, in act), of exposing or even creating the possibility of its meaning. In the following section, I will return to Nancy, to these questions and their relation to the concept of equality. First, however, I will
examine the ways in which equality is formulated in the works of Rancière and Badiou, because despite their significant differences, each of their theories of equality presuppose a form of agency as a shared human capacity that is less difficult to pin down. Ultimately, Rancière and Badiou each offer us a unique blueprint for how to narrow the gap between ontology and action, and I believe that we can gain a richer understanding both of the problem of equality for democracy in general and the consequences of this problem for identity and agency in particular by putting them in conversation with one another.

(ii) At the Limits of the Common: Egalité

The question with which I begin here is as follows: what effect, if any, does the shift away from thinking agency as an individual capacity to ‘act independently’ toward agency as a shared human capacity and socially distributed phenomenon have on our understanding of equality? Or perhaps instead, to what extent is a different understanding of equality necessary for our ability to conceive of agency in this way? Equality, liberty and community have long formed the basis for our thinking of democratic political identity and agency. I have examined the ways in which freedom has been translated into policy in the forms of liberty and sovereignty and explored some of the effects this has had not only on the ways in which we understand and construct ourselves as subjects, but also upon democracy itself in the face of its waning status and legitimacy. ‘Politicized’ forms of equality, the most notable of which takes the form of rights, seem to fall victim to the same problematic because they tend to have the effect of reducing equality to general equivalence, rendering any one subject interchangeable for any other. We see the effects of this effacement of difference throughout our political histories, and we have discussed the ways in which identity politics has been
framed as a way of ‘pushing back’ against this tendency. Identity politics, however, is a politics that remains bound to and dependent upon classical liberal forms of equality.

The interrogation of various principles of equality is central to the democratic project, and the questioning of those principles has also been central to various post-structural/postmodern reconsiderations of democratic politics. In a piece titled “Re-writing Equality,” Fran Tonkiss identifies what she sees to be the three basic ideas that are invoked through the postmodern critique of modern principles of equality.357 First, she identifies a line of argument that modern principles of equality involve a ‘false universalization’ that is dependent upon the notion of an original, shared human condition that assumes the essential equality of all people.358 Second, there is the contention that such principles are too formalistic, and when divorced from specific social contexts, are revealed to be ‘empty.’359 Third, she outlines the notion that a formal concept of equality between individuals covers over important questions of difference.360 In searching for an understanding of equality that attempts to acknowledge and/or circumvent these problems, I will now turn to the theories of equality that are offered by Badiou and Rancière, and examine them specifically in terms of some of the ways in which equality and agency are interconnected in these theories.

After laying out the central points of each thinker’s understanding of equality, I turn to a potential criticism of these understandings that is framed in terms of this very connection. Specifically, one could argue that while Badiou and Rancière both espouse theories of equality that claim to avoid the problems associated with classical liberal forms of equality, their approaches fail to fully address the complexities of social and political life in the contemporary world. In other words, while these theories offer a critique of classical liberal models of equality, they do not provide a comprehensive framework for understanding and engaging with the diverse and often conflicting demands of contemporary political and social life.

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equality, each formulation is grounded in a form of agency that ultimately creates a ‘one,’ the consequence of which is the emergence of a marked inequality through exclusion. At this point I return to Nancy, who doesn’t explicitly espouse a theory of equality, yet implies a form of equality through the ‘Singular Plural’ that is not grounded in an active capacity but rather in the onological condition itself. Is Nancy’s understanding of equality something we could deploy through collective action in order to strengthen or enhance democracy in practice as is the case with the theories of Rancière and Badiou? Or is the ‘Singular Plural’ a condition that remains firmly rooted in the philosophical realm? What effect, if any, would an understanding of equality such as Nancy’s have on our thinking of democracy? As a means of formulating a response to these questions, as a question aimed at Rancière, Badiou and Nancy, and finally, as a doorway into our discussion of ‘fraternity,’ I turn to Rogues and Derrida’s appraisal of Nancy’s understanding of equality, where he writes:

[W]e will soon have to ask ourselves the following, right along with the question of the brother: in politics, and even in law […], does this measure of the immeasurable, this democratic equality, end at citizenship, and thus at the borders of the nation state? Or must we extend it to the whole world of singularities, to the whole world of humans assumed to be like me, my compers […] – or else, even further […]?

My discussion of Rancière, Badiou and Nancy is focused upon the question of who is equal, or more precisely since I am trying to move away from understanding these concepts as anything one can ‘possess,’ of where equality can potentially exist. It is through this

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361 Another critique of this kind of understanding of equality is that a formulation of equality as something that is hidden, like politics, only surfacing temporarily under the correct circumstances, is too limiting and does not take the next step toward institutionalization. See for example, Ella Myers, “Presupposing Equality,” in Philosophy & Social Criticism 42, no. 1 (January, 2016): 45-69.

362 Derrida, Rogues, 53.
discussion that I am forced once again to circle back toward the question of a connection between equality and agency: how do we ‘do’ equality? How can we engage in the act or becoming of equality? In order to get to these questions, I will first turn to the theories themselves.

The question of equality is absolutely central to the projects of both Rancière and Badiou. Each writes extensively on the topic of equality, and each names equality as a fundamental condition for politics. Each also rejects the notion of equality as ‘general equivalence,’ favoring instead notions of equality that are rooted in specific human capacities. The starker difference between the theories of Badiou and Rancière on the topic of equality revolves around its point of emergence. Badiou’s account of equality finds equality to be something that is *declared* (as a maxim), whereas Rancière frames equality as something that is *verified* (as an assumption). Put a little differently, Badiou posits equality as a possible outcome, whereas Rancière posits equality as a starting point or pre-condition, arguing for example that inequality *presupposes* equality. Badiou’s declaration, on the other hand, attempts to locate and capture an ‘inexistent’ universal equality.\(^363\) What they have in common is the fact that each recognizes a deep connection between equality and human agency, and each to a certain extent makes the case that the capacity for equality is specifically related to intelligence. This connection is, for obvious reasons, problematic, and I will address a criticism of this notion. In order to narrow our discussion of equality so that we will become able draw some connections between the problem of equality as it relates to democracy, community, agency and eventually dispossession, I will focus this initial discussion around the question: *who* is equal?

Looking first to Badiou, equality is understood in terms of the subject and of truth. In *Logics of Worlds*, he uses Spartacus and the Roman slave revolt as an example of how an ‘egalitarian maxim’ works by citing the maxim that “the slave wants to and can decide to be free and return home.” Under such a maxim, a group of individuals is incorporated as its ‘subject’ when they declare it and live according to it in the present. The egalitarian maxim is not an aim or a future aspiration; it is not even an empirical claim about an actually existing state of affairs. Equality, for Badiou, is declared by a subject (singular or plural) as the truth of a present situation. Not every political situation has an egalitarian maxim, and not all people are equal without exception. Furthermore, equality cannot be reduced to a social programme because it has nothing to do with the social. Equality for Badiou is not a principle of action, nor is it a presupposition of action. It is the result of the action of those who nominate it, namely the militants or revolutionaries who are responsible for having brought about the Event out of which the declaration of equality was made. In *Metapolitics*, Badiou writes that political equality “is not what we desire or plan; it is that which we declare to be, here and now, in the heat of the moment, and not something that should be.” Equality is brought into being in the moment of its declaration and sustained through a fidelity to the truth of that declaration. With this gesture, Badiou successfully avoids the tendency of politicized forms of equality to become ‘egalitarian principles,’ and he circumvents the problem of their tendency toward totalization or general equivalence by framing equality as a context-specific (and context-dependent) product.

It is important to pause here and return to the question of who is equal in this formulation. It is not the case for Badiou that all people without exception are equal. To return to a point above, under a maxim of equality, a group of individuals is incorporated as

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364 Ibid., 63.
its ‘subject’ when they make a declaration of equality and live according to it in the present. This declaration, however, is dependent upon the capacity to be ‘seized by a truth’ or ‘incorporated into an Idea’ as a result of thinking. When defining equality as it applies to political actors, Badiou writes that “equality means that the political actor is represented under the sole sign of the uniquely human capacity. [...] Thought is the one and only uniquely human capacity, and thought, strictly speaking, is simply that through which the human animal is seized and traversed by the trajectory of a truth.” The potential for equality to be declared, to become fact, is grounded in our capacity to think. To summarize, Badiou’s requirements for political equality are threefold: equality only applies to the subject of a truth; a prior decision (and resulting declaration) is necessary in order for a subject to be incorporated into that truth; and this subject must possess the capacity to remain faithful to that truth. Therefore, equality, in Badiou’s view, does not pertain to ‘human animals’ in general, but only to ‘the subject of a truth.’

The fact that Badiou does not espouse the notion that ‘all people are equal without exception’ is not in itself problematic. As I argued above, doing away with this kind of understanding of equality is necessary in order to avoid the negative consequences of totalizing thought as they unfold in and through politics. He also very successfully articulates a theory of equality in act, or equality as becoming in the sense that it is never figured as existing apart from the circumstances through which it is declared and the subject’s fidelity to it. Its existence is not seen to exceed the subject because it is wholly dependent upon the subject for its coming-to-presence. Equality is something that is identified by the subject,

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366 To be ‘seized by a truth’ is the language Badiou uses in Being and Event and Metapolitics; to be ‘incorporated into an Idea’ is the language he uses in Logics of Worlds. Each of these phrases, in this case, refers to his assertion that the subject must be capable of comprehending the universal notion of equality in order to be able to be swept up in its truth, declare it to be the truth of that situation, and to remain faithful to it. 367 Badiou, Metapolitics, 97-98.
declared, and incorporated as part of that subject’s political identity in and through the subject’s fidelity to it. Badiou’s understanding of equality is well-suited to the stakes set out in this project, both in terms of his turning away from a concept of equality that adheres to modern liberal understandings, and in terms of the criteria I laid out earlier in this project for an alternative way to think political identity. I will go a step further and argue that Badiou’s understanding of equality also operates within the same aesthetic framework that I have adopted for examining these concepts as they are deployed in politics, specifically insofar as equality as a ‘concept’ seems not to contain a fixed meaning, but rather represents the possibility of meaning which is only realized in a particular way in each unique set of circumstances through which it is declared. I have the word ‘concept’ in quotation marks because it seems more appropriate to refer to the sense of equality, as Nancy would use it, where ‘sense’ refers to the possibility of meaning rather than any kind of fixed meaning.\(^{368}\) A declaration of equality, then, is also constitutive of a decision about what sense equality will carry with it, what it will mean under that particular set of circumstances, without closing off its other senses. To borrow Rancière’s phrasing once again, each declaration of equality also invokes a particular distribution of the sensible, where sense in this case also reflects Nancy’s understanding insofar it refers to what it is possible to see, hear, do and think.

The potential danger that emerges in Badiou’s formulation, however, is the possibility that not everyone has the capacity to be equal insofar as equality is premised upon a universal human capacity. It is thus not only equality that is declared and brought into being in this moment, but also inequality, insofar as those subjects who lack the capacity to be “seized and traversed by the trajectory of a truth” are potentially excluded.\(^{369}\) This problem,

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\(^{368}\) Nancy employs this understanding of sense in most of his work, but its fullest elaboration occurs in *The Sense of the World.*  
\(^{369}\) Ibid., 98.
understandably, opens up into the larger and much more fraught problem of determining the limits of political subjectivity and agency in general. In one sense, Badiou’s *ontological* understanding of equality is arguably more universally applicable to all human beings, insofar as it refers to all ‘elements’ of a given situation and demands that they all belong (or exist, or count, etc.) ‘in the same way.’ In my reading, this particular understanding would be better described as a theory of *universality* rather than of equality specifically. Equality is certainly a form of universality, but Badiou’s description of ‘all elements of a given situation all belonging in the same way’ could apply to any figuration of the universal. His understanding of political equality, although not distinct from the ontological, appears on the other hand to be purely subjective. His abstract ‘logic of the Same’ gives way through his theorization of the Event to specific moments through which the active declaration of equality that is performed by a political subject is realized only by and for those who have the capacity to take part in this declaration and remain faithful to it. Equality is declared by those few who are able to grasp it, and then others can be led to it.370 Therein lies the second danger associated with the first, which is that Badiou’s process for bringing about equality potentially contains the seeds of a new hierarchy which could replace the old. In this reading, that means that anyone who is not able to assert their own equality, or unwilling to assert it in the way in which it has been nominated, is altogether excluded from it. This kind of formulation of equality contains a bind spot, or silence, which creates a new void: not only are those who lack this capacity silenced from the outset, but the existence of this blind spot leaves open the possibility for other voices to be silenced by it. Given the parameters of this project, I will sidestep these issues by simply stating that Badiou’s formulation does

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370 What is grasped in general terms is a ‘truth,’ where one such truth is equality. Badiou cites Lenin and Mao as examples of figures who have been able to ‘grasp’ this truth and open up a space in which others can have access to it as well (*Logics of Worlds* and *Polemics*).
potentially lead us down this path. For the moment, it will have to suffice to state that when I see Badiou’s process through, it leads me to argue that in making a declaration of, and maintaining fidelity to, political equality (as opposed to universality), one is also (at least potentially and perhaps unwittingly) making a declaration of and maintaining fidelity to a fundamental inequality. I will return to this potential problem, but for now, I will turn to Rancière and to whether or not he is able to avoid it.

In stark contrast to Badiou, Rancière understands equality as a presupposition rather than a result. Although it is formulated in terms of a universal prior assumption, equality in Rancière’s view does not possess any determinate content, nor does it possess an *a priori* foundation. In *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Rancière draws an important distinction between two forms of equality: ‘the political universal’ and ‘the State universal.’ Equality as the State universal is conceived of as “what makes a community out of a multiplicity of individuals,” while equality as the political universal is a presupposition or condition. Equality as the State universal is in line with the current liberal democratic understanding of equality, and is deeply entrenched in the police order. The State universal functions to occlude difference in order to construct a communal identity, such as that of ‘the nation’ or ‘the people,’ to whom it grants juridical equality on the condition of membership. It is the State universal that presides over those who are able to ‘take part’ in a particular distribution of the sensible. It works to establish, legitimize and maintain the hierarchy of the police order, and in so doing, functions to establish, legitimize and maintain that fundamental inequality in the distribution of the sensible through which the ‘part with no part’ becomes a heterogeneous remainder that must be repressed in order for the State universal to function properly. Equality as the political universal poses a direct challenge to this function.

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If we return momentarily to Rancière’s understanding of politics, we can recall that for him, ‘politics’ is more closely associated with what other thinkers refer to as ‘the political,’ whereas the police order is the name he gives to the administrative, organizational and legitimizing procedures of governance as well as the distribution of the social in particular places and roles. Equality belongs to the side of politics. Rancière argues that “equality is actually the condition required for being able to think about politics.” This designation informs and is informed by Rancière’s discussions of democracy and politics in *Dis-agreement* and *Hatred of Democracy*. According to Rancière, politics is a particular form of rationality based on the assumption of equality upon which every social order is dependant but which it actively seeks to conceal. In his own words:

> [P]olitical activity is always a mode of expression that undoes the perceptible divisions of the police order by implementing a basically heterogeneous assumption, that of a part of those who have no part, an assumption that, at the end of the day, itself demonstrates the sheer contingency of the order, the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being.

This excerpt is illustrative of Rancière’s understanding of politics and the role that equality plays. Although in many ways this understanding is similar to that of Badiou, as Badiou himself has claimed, the most fundamental difference lies in the heterogeneous assumption of the equality of all speaking beings. Rancière’s conception of politics is figured as collective action which stems from the presupposition of equality. Equality is therefore not a truth that is grasped and then declared, but the reverse: it is an assumption to be verified.

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375 Rancière is accused of having replicated Badiou’s own notions of equality, the state of the situation (in Rancière’s ‘counting of parts’) and the event as a nomination (Rancière’s politics) in the chapter entitled “Rancière and Apolitics” in *Metapolitics*, 218-231.
Turning to *Disagreement* once again, Rancière explains that “equality is not a given that politics then presses into service, an essence embodied in the law or a goal politics sets itself the task of attaining. It is a mere assumption that needs to be discerned within the practices implementing it.”

Rancière posits an actually existing equality, anchoring his argument in the same claims to inequality that seek to refute it. He achieves this by arguing that inequality is self-contradictory insofar as it must *assume* equality in order to make its claim. A good example of what he means can be found where he discusses the freedom of the Athenians in the Aventine apologia:

In the Aventine apologia, this assumption of equality is to be discerned even within a discourse proclaiming the fatal fact of inequality. Menenius Agrippa explains to the plebs that they are only the stupid members of a city whose soul is its patricians. But to teach the plebs their place this way he must assume they understand what he is saying. He must presume the equality of speaking beings, which contradicts the police distribution of bodies who are put in their place and assigned their role.

It is important to note here that this ‘equality of speaking beings’ is to a large extent an equality of intelligence. Through this example, Rancière argues that any slave who possesses the ability to comprehend and obey his master is de facto equal to that master because of their equal capacities to understand and respond to instructions. In having gone to convince the slaves of the justice of their inequality, the master has already conceded their equality in his assumption that they will understand him and the slaves verify this assumption by understanding and responding to him. Equality, therefore, is verified through this act of

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377 Ibid., 33.
communication. Todd May offers a far more modern example of what Rancière is pointing to here by looking to the lunch-counter sit-ins which took place during the U.S. civil rights movement. These sit-ins were staged protests, peaceful on behalf of those who participated in them, though the protesters themselves were refused service, taunted, and often beaten and arrested. May asks us to look more closely at the actions of those involved, however, where we find an excellent illustration of Rancière’s approach to politics:

The activists in these sit-ins presupposed that they were equal to anyone else and, therefore, had the right to order lunch, like white folks. They presupposed that they would be understood and that, therefore, their orders could be taken. In fact, those who taunted them more or less presupposed the same thing. After all, if the protestors were incapable of ordering lunch, how could they understand what was being said to them by those who taunted them?

We can see a similar operation being carried out in many ‘civil disobedience’ cases. When France passed its law banning face veils in 2011, for example, small groups of women stood together in protest wearing niqabs and burqas in public places. These women presupposed that they would be ‘seen’ by the authorities, that they could (quite literally) ‘appear’ in public wearing their veils. Police officers who stood by waiting to apprehend them while they staged their protest have to have presupposed the same thing.

Although Rancière’s approach is different from that of Badiou, the problem of who is excluded from this assumption is still potentially a problem they share. In Rancière’s conception, then, those who cannot speak or understand orders constitute a third group: in his example above there are masters who reason for inequality and slaves who exhibit their

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379 Ibid., 64.
equality by speaking and understanding, but those who lack the capacity to enter into the
dialogue in the first place remain invisible. This third group is either spoken for or excluded
altogether. Rancière maintains that he is not assuming a universal equality of intelligence, but
that isn’t exactly what is at stake here. The problem isn’t the theoretical assumption of
universal equality; rather, it lies in the restriction of the discussion of the possibility of
equality in practice to those with the ability to speak and understand. In *The Ignorant
Schoolmaster*, he writes that “one need only learn how to be equal in an unequal society,”
and that this is the road to freedom. The question thus remains of whether or not it is
sufficient for Rancière to assume that all intelligences are equal in theory in order to ensure
that equality in practice is truly ‘equal,’ that is, faithful to the assumption of equality upon
which it is premised. An equally large problem, which is the focus of the following chapter,
is that of the ‘excluded part,’ those without voice who have no ‘right’ to speak or be heard:
how can s/he make a declaration or demonstrate her intelligence? I believe that the only way
to properly address these criticisms is to clarify of Rancière’s theory of universality.

The division of politics which is enacted in Badiou’s work between ‘militants’ and
‘everyone else’ is not present in Rancière’s thought, or is at the very least figured in a very
different way. Recall that in *Disagreement*, Rancière describes politics as “the art of the local
and singular construction of universality.” In relation to this discussion of equality, we
create a universality for equality first by making a claim of equality and then by facing others
with that claim, putting them in a position to either accept or deny it. This means that,
through the action of the subject who presupposes equality, those who are better off in the

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380 Rancière discusses the problem of assuming a universal equality in many places, but probably most
extensively in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. It is in this text that he acknowledges that he could not possibly
‘prove’ that all intelligences are equal, but his argument rests upon what is possible under the assumption of
such a position.
381 Ibid., 133.
382 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 139.
police hierarchy are forced either to accept that presupposition and thus change the existing order, or deny it. Yet, as May points out, it is very difficult to deny the claim that ‘everyone is equal’ in the 21st century, where the presupposition of equality is almost universally agreed upon in principle, if not always followed through on in practice. Those who would openly deny the presupposition of equality made through another’s actions run the risk of contradicting a value that is (nearly) universally held. This confrontation with the police order takes place in the name of a value that is universally held prior to its occurrence.

In Badiou’s ontology, there is an excess to every situation that cannot be counted, an excess that militants are able to bring to the fore in order to radically disrupt the state of the situation. These ‘truths’ are universals that can be grasped by certain political subjects (militants), who can in turn teach those who don’t know and struggle against those who refuse this knowledge. There are few subjects who have the ability to grasp these truths because they are so well hidden, so the responsibility of leading others to this truth falls in the hands of those who are capable of grasping it. Rancière, employing an inverse method, tends to politicize and historicize the ontological. Where Badiou’s method for bringing about equality requires that political subjects be able to grasp an ontological excess, Rancière’s method requires only the presupposition of equality: political equality creates a ‘we’ as well as the recognition that ‘we’ are equal to each other and to those who consider us less than equal. For Rancière, then, there is no underlying ontology; one either recognizes equality or does not. Although there are many ways in which their theories operate in a very similar way, what most strongly distinguishes Rancière’s conception of politics from that of Badiou

384 Ibid., 66.
385 Ibid., 64.
386 Ibid., 65.
387 Ibid., 65.
388 Ibid., 67.
is that for Rancière, “this is the only type of politics that really counts as such, the only politics that would merit the name democratic.” Badiou’s inclusion of an underlying ontological structure in political activity opens the door to the figure of the militant who, unlike the masses, understands and can articulate the missing truth of a situation, and who then becomes the warden(s) of that truth. The danger here is, of course, that the militant(s) might instead assume the place of those who they sought to overthrow, thus reinscribing the same inequality against which they initially fought. Those who are excluded from this truth are, in this case, typically the ‘everyone else’ with whom the newfound equality was to be shared. The figure of the militant assumes the title to rule through his/her ability to grasp the truth. Rancière, in stark contrast to this, advocates against anyone claiming the right to rule. In Hatred of Democracy, he writes that democracy first and foremost refers to an, “anarchic ‘government,’ one based on nothing other than the absence of every title to rule.” Rancière’s anarchism occurs on the basis of ‘an-archy,’ or the absence of any kind of principle of entitlement to rule, and as such, it is “a politics of anyone and everyone.”

In order to attempt to round out this discussion of different conceptions of equality, I would like to include an account of equality that, although it is grounded in ontology, does not solely rely on a particular identity or capacity for its articulation. To this end, I will return once more to Nancy in order to offer such an alternative. In Being Singular Plural, for example, Nancy is careful to reject certain understandings of equality before laying out his own. Like Badiou (and in a slightly different context, Rancière), he rejects the notion that

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389 Ibid., 67. Original emphasis.
390 Ibid., 68.
391 Rancière, Hatred of Democracy, 41.
392 Love and May, “From Universality to Equality,” 68.
393 Through my search for such an alternative, I came across the following article that does a good job discussing these three thinkers and their engagements with equality in a similar manner but is more focused on a critique of the problem of the exclusion of people with differing/limited capacities: Christopher Watkin, “Thinking Equality Today: Badiou, Rancière, Nancy,” French Studies 67, no. 4 (2013): 522-534, accessed February 12, 2016, doi:10.1093/fs/knt148.
human beings are equal according to an abstract regime of “general equivalence,” under which, for example, any person or idea would be exchangeable with any other person or idea according to capitalist democratic ideal of a universal equality of exchange. It is safe to say that Badiou and Nancy are in close agreement on this point, in that the idea of general equivalence fails to recognize that the ‘things’ being equated with one another are not at all equivalent. I would argue that Rancière would also agree with this objection in the sense that general equivalence is precisely the kind of logic that renders ‘the part with no part’ invisible in the first place. Unlike Rancière and Badiou, however, Nancy rejects the understanding of equality as something that can be grounded in the shared human capacity of language, in part because equality cannot be grounded, and in part because Nancy’s understanding of our relation to language is dramatically different from that of Rancière and Badiou. I will remark very briefly on the latter, trying not to wander to far afield of this discussion of equality, before returning to the former point about equality as an ungrounding force.

Given the elaborate relationship that exists between sense and meaning in Nancy’s work, it is not surprising that he also identifies language as belonging to sense. Watkin identified the place where this thinking is most fully elaborated as Nancy’s Adoration, where Nancy argues that all human language is an ‘adoration of sense,’ where adoration is broken down etymologically as ad-oratio, or ‘speaking towards.’ Given that sense refers to the possibility or excess of meaning, then we can understand language in Nancy’s work as a ‘speaking towards’ the possibility/excess of meaning. The excess of sense is not something we can possess (as a capacity), but rather is something to which we are exposed. We are beings of language, but language reveals the infinite possibility and excess of the sense of ‘being’ or of ‘the world,’ not just our own possibilities as human beings. Our use of language

is a large part of what makes us human and what makes us equal, but it is also by virtue of the relation between language and sense that equality does not properly ‘belong’ to us, and cannot be reduced to the product of a certain capacity.\textsuperscript{396} Sense decentres us, forcing us outside of ourselves to adore (ad-oratio, speak toward) the possibility and excess of ‘being’ (the totality of ‘what is’). Equality is intimately connected to language, but not in the sense that Rancière and Badiou indicate, where “all beings who have the capacity to speak and/or understand and/or think thereby verify their equality or are seized by its maxim.”\textsuperscript{397} Instead, for Nancy, language reveals to us the excess of sense over the signification of any existent.

Turning now to address the ‘ungrounding force’ of equality, I will look again to \textit{Being Singular Plural}. Nancy argues that ‘singulars’ are incommensurable with one another, and therefore have nothing in common. Or rather, singularity is the only thing that singulars have in common.\textsuperscript{398} If singularity is the only thing that is truly held in common, what does that mean for equality? Mustn’t equality, more than freedom, be ‘shared’ in order to be actualized? In Badiou’s formulation, equality is supposed to be shared by those militants who are able to grasp it, and Rancière’s presupposition is shared by all speaking beings. For Nancy, equality is located at the same ontological level as singularity, freedom, and justice, insofar as each constitutes a different way of infinitely approaching the absence of foundation. It is at this ontological level therefore that we are able to ‘share’ in equality. Let us return for a moment, then, to Nancy’s understanding of freedom to gain some more solid footing here. In this ‘post-foundational’ sense to which I pointed a moment ago – as a means by which we approach the absence of foundation – Nancy defines freedom as, “\textit{the foundation which by itself does not secure itself as foundation}, but which refers through its

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396 Ibid., 529.
397 Ibid., 530.
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essence to a foundation of itself. [...] the foundation of foundation therefore founds, in
Heideggerian terms, in the mode of the ‘abyss’ [...]” 399 This definition needs some
unpacking. Freedom is a foundation, but one that cannot secure itself as a principle, cause,
authority or origin. It is also important to note here that the ‘abyss’ does not become the
‘new’ ground, even in a negative sense. Ontological freedom acquires its
grounding/ungrounding force only through its ontic realization. Freedom must therefore be
understood as “the very movement of disclosure” through the act of freeing or liberation. 400

Freedom, we can recall, cannot be ‘given’ or granted to someone based on a capacity
or merit. “Freedom can only be taken: this is what the revolutionary tradition represents [...] 
taking freedom means that freedom takes itself, that has already received itself, from
itself.” 401 This same philosophical maneuver can be undertaken in the case of equality (and
singularity, and justice, etc.). Each of these ‘modes’ is defined in its relation toward
something – toward a particular closure or withdrawal – rather than in relation to any kind of
empirically given, positive, or measurable content. Equality, for example, would therefore be
defined in its relation toward the withdrawal of equivalence and/or totality. Likewise,
freedom would be defined in its relation toward the withdrawal of ‘liberty’ in its
institutionalized forms. Words such as ‘freedom’ and ‘equality’ for Nancy are simply
different ontological names for the retreat of foundation that is linked to the process of
liberation and the administration of ‘strict equality.’ These ontological quasi-principles have
no force outside of or apart from action. Nancy explains that, “the political act of freedom is
freedom in action and not the aim of a regulative ideal of freedom.” 402 Likewise, therefore,
the political act of equality is equality in action, and not the aim of a regulative ideal of

399 Nancy, The Experience of Freedom, 86.
400 Ibid., 94.
401 Ibid., 77.
402 Ibid., 77.
equality. Nancy is confirming here what I have already asserted in a few different ways, namely that the ‘politically significant’ act of equality – that is, the act that will have a direct impact in terms of shifting us away from the totalizing force of carefully measured equivalence – will not be found within the regime itself, and will therefore not take the form of an exercise of right. This also means that equality (or freedom, or justice) in the way they are characterized by Nancy can never be fully institutionalized or captured within the ontic dimension of politics. Practically speaking, this presents us with a fairly serious problem. Because Nancy thinks politics mainly from the perspective of the retreat of the political, he is largely focused the ontological dimension in his political theory rather than ontic dimension of politics.

Although Nancy undoubtedly seems to side with an activist approach to democratic politics, he is wary of those more radical post-foundational approaches that tend to conceive of politics in ‘insurrectionist’ terms, where the aim is “politics in a State of permanent revolution.” While he agrees that these ideas are an important and even necessary step toward ridding ourselves of the notion of the State as something that is itself grounded in truth, he offers three marked yet interconnected criticisms of the logics that tend to underlie these projects. First, he cautions us against the urge to replace the nonexistent foundation of the State with a new ‘foundation in truth,’ where this new truth is intended to lead us to discover the “democratic apotheosis of mankind (and the world) into a realm of equality, justice, fraternity, and freedom from power of any kind.” To make his point, he draws our attention to the etymology of the suffixes –cracy, which refers to “force and violent

404 Ibid., 64.
imposition,” and –archy, which relates to “power that is grounded, legitimated by some principle.” The point, he tells us, is that the very word ‘democracy’ appears to contain a built-in barrier to the possibility of a foundational principle. This is precisely the reason behind the invention of the notion of ‘natural law/right’ as an attempt to provide a foundation for the forms of ‘right’ and ‘law’ that are generated by democratic institutions. According to Nancy, it is impossible to ground democracy in a transcendent principle: “the only thing that grounds or founds democracy is an absence: the absence of any human nature.” His second line of critique flows out of the first. Nancy agrees that thinking politics without foundation allows the spheres of truth and meaning (art, thought, love, desire) to be nurtured apart from the State. The problem, however, is that “what we have got into the habit of calling democracy tends […] to present these spheres as homogeneous […] to the properly political sphere.” Nancy’s contention is that we must instead think about the manner in which these spheres are heterogeneous not only to the State but also to politics. Politics, he argues, is responsible for the notion that something like ‘totality’ might be attainable, and was thus driven to erase its own limits in the claim that ‘everything is political.’ The role of politics, however, is not as a foundation of meaning, but rather as that which constantly renews the possibilities open to forms of meaning (arts, language, love, thought, knowledge, etc.). Politics is not itself a form and thus does not attain any kind of fulfillment of ends. Instead, Nancy argues that “politics pertains to indefinition,” and is thus not “the locus of the heavenly assumption of ends,” but rather the locus of access to the possibility of ends. It is

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405 Ibid., 65.
406 Ibid., 66.
407 Ibid., 64. My emphasis.
408 Ibid., 73.
409 Ibid., 73.
410 Ibid., 74. My emphasis.
through politics, then, that we gain access to the possibility of freedom, equality and community.

In the third and final layer of his critique, Nancy argues that these theories tend to overlook the necessary function of power in the institution of any kind of politics, including democracy. He is careful to note that politics itself is not a ‘form’ but rather that which creates and renews the possibilities of forms, and it is also through politics that power is given form. Nancy argues that democracy has a problem with power because the type of right or law that is uniquely produced by it implies a profound weakening or outright disappearance of any kind of “specific, separate instance of power,” such as that which is represented by the State.\footnote{Ibid., 67.} Democracy retreats from the use of power (specifically, the ‘exterior’ kind associated with ‘legitimate violence’) because the use of this kind of power marks the absence of those symbolic truths upon which communities base themselves (religion, national unity, collective identity, etc.).\footnote{Ibid., 68.} Political power is aimed at the protection of the social, even if that sometimes means that it must challenge or alter its composition. Power, Nancy argues, “is in place to enable societized human beings to work out their own goals for themselves, goals over which power as such is powerless: the endless ends of meaning, of meanings, of forms, of intensities of desire.”\footnote{Ibid., 70.} This power is not the same as that external power which is associated with legitimate violence. Nancy calls it a ‘power drive,’ an internal form of power that contains no predetermined goal or purpose other than to surpass external power.\footnote{Nancy compares this ‘power drive’ to Nietzsche’s ‘will to power’ and Spinoza’s ‘conatus.’} “The surpassing of power is the very principle of democracy – but as its truth and grandeur (indeed its majesty), not as its annihilation.”\footnote{Ibid., 70.}
Each of these thinkers would agree in his own way that when we understand existing notions of freedom, right, and equality solely as products of the existing undemocratic and/or unequal order, we are forced to conclude that the truly democratic politics we are seeking can only be found in some radically ‘other’ domain. In Radical Cosmopolitics, James Ingram argues that this is the result of a single-minded view through which existing institutions and values are regarded as expressing nothing more than a logic of domination.\textsuperscript{416} Conceiving of politics in this way, as Rancière would certainly agree, is to deny it any point against which claims to freedom, equality and right could be made. Ingram cites Hardt and Negri’s Empire trilogy as one example of this kind of approach to politics, in which the democratic ‘multitude’ is presented as the antithesis of ‘Empire’ (the totality of structures of domination), where this multitude simply has to (somehow) cast off its shackles in order to establish itself as a “freely cooperating plurality.”\textsuperscript{417} Ingram locates another variation of this logic in the work of Simon Critchley. Despite the fact that Critchley utilizes Rancière’s notion of democratic politics, Ingram argues that Critchley detaches that notion from any and all institutional frameworks, thus forcing him to “consign democratic politics to the domain of ethics, on the one hand, and ‘anarchic metapolitics’ on the other – a politics of protest waged outside and against existing institutions.”\textsuperscript{418} Ingram maintains that while it is a mistake to identify democratic universalism with institutions, it is also a mistake to identify it with their simple negation. He argues that if we instead work to preserve the tension between the universalizing claims of right and their individual instantiations, bearing in mind the many ways in which the former can be set against the latter, we become able to position ourselves politically by right, “radically reinterpreted as an expansive political logic

\textsuperscript{417} Ibid., 219.
\textsuperscript{418} Ibid., 219-220.
advanced principally through claims from below.”\(^{419}\) Ingram proposes that we leave behind
the notion of right as an abstract way of determining the proper limits of freedom and
equality, but that we also resist reducing it to a figure of pure opposition.\(^{420}\) He offers in
place of these an understanding of right as “the struggle to overcome particular forms of
unfreedom and inequality.”\(^{421}\)

Like Ingram, Badiou, Rancière, and Nancy also advocate for politics that is aimed at
overcoming obstacles to freedom and equality. Each also offers us a point against which we
can make claims to freedom and equality through spaces that are opened up in order to
overcome unfreedom and inequality. For Badiou, this involves grasping and sharing a truth;
for Rancière, this involves a universal presupposition; for Nancy, this involves keeping
politics open as a formless precondition for access to the possibilities of freedom and
equality. In each case, what we see is politics figured in terms of an act of becoming rather
than as a fixed form. When politics is understood as being indeterminate in this sense, when
it is figured in terms of *politicization* or *democratization*, it remains open-ended. Politics, for
each of these thinkers, names the possibility of a transformation. Staging a political scene,
even a radical one, does not necessitate or imply the overthrow of the State. Instead, it
involves a performative act of what Nancy calls *déclosion*, the reversal of a prior
closing/foreclosure, through which we become able to present freedom and equality in new
ways wherever and whenever they are denied. Democratic politics is therefore both ‘action in
common’ and, “action against the (existing configuration of the) common, which, when
successful, reconfigures it.”\(^{422}\)

\(^{419}\) Ibid., 221.
\(^{420}\) Ibid., 222.
\(^{421}\) Ibid., 222. My emphasis.
\(^{422}\) Ibid., 224.
In light of this understanding of democratic politics, I will now turn my attention to discussing the sphere of the common in a few of its many forms. My focus falls upon the tension between those democratic notions of the common as promoting social stability through a common bond and something like the sense of incommensurability which Nancy claims lies at the heart of every such community that is identified in other forms and articulated by other thinkers such as Esposito and Derrida. Specifically, I will contrast the notion that the preservation of the common is central to the maintenance of democracy against claims such as the one above that action against the common is also necessary.

Returning to the discussion of identity politics undertaken at the beginning of this chapter, I will explore some of the reasons why and how ‘action in common that is aimed against the common’ is a definitive (and perhaps necessary) feature of democracy. More importantly, however, I will attempt to gain further insight into why collective action of this kind seems to be weakening, and whether we can circumvent these problems in future attempts to construct a ‘post-identity politics.’
Thus is announced the anchoritic community of those who love in separation … The invitation comes to you from those who can love only at a distance, in separation … Those who love only in cutting ties are the uncompromising friends of solitary singularity. They invite you to enter into this community of social disaggregation …

- Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*

Chapter 4: (Ab)senses of Democracy: Fraternité, (et) ou la Mort!

The term ‘fraternity’ has come to be more closely associated with a nostalgic, romanticized, and occasionally dangerous notion of bond than it is with the ways in which we organize ourselves politically. I will not rehash the deconstruction of the concept of fraternity as it has been undertaken in contemporary theory between Nancy, Derrida and Blanchot, as this would be a dissertation project unto itself.\(^\text{423}\) Instead, I will explore the place in the motto that is occupied by fraternity, which in my mind signals both a demand for community and a search for the origin or ‘essence’ of community through which we would be able to share in both freedom and equality. Specifically, I explore contours and limits of that imaginary space in which we negotiate the relations between being-with, representation and legitimacy. Although it was commonly held that fraternity was the “realization-transcendence” of liberty and equality, I ask: is there a sacrifice implied in this negotiation, as there appeared to be in the negotiation *between* liberty and equality?\(^\text{424}\)


\(^{424}\) Fraternity as a “realization-transcendence” of liberty and equality was a notion coined by French historian Jean Michelet, as cited in Mona Ozouf’s entry, “Fraternity,” in *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution,*
we break these bonds with others for the sake of pursuing representation? Does one have to sacrifice individual representation for the sake of the legitimacy of the people? Or further, beyond sacrificing one’s individuality or one’s freedom for the sake of belonging to a community, in Roberto Esposito’s thought for example, “what the community sacrifices—to its own self-preservation—is nothing other than itself. In the sacrifice not only of every enemy but also of every one of its members, it sacrifices itself, from the moment that every one of its members finds in the depths of their own being the originary figure of the first enemy.”

And finally, is this what ‘ou la mort’ ultimately signifies?

The largest section of this chapter deals with fraternity and community. Specifically, I examine the relation between fraternity and community, both in terms of the similarities and juxtapositions between these two concepts. By the late 20th century, we had all but decided that fraternity had no place in the formation of political communities, and that it was perhaps best left to religion and off-campus housing. Part of the problem with fraternity is that it is inherently exclusionary, designed to delimit a strict sense of inside and outside. Another problem, however, was that once the concept of fraternity was extended beyond actual familial limits, it came to rely almost exclusively upon affect (or a ‘feeling’ of brotherhood that is extended toward others in order to form the community) to bond its members, which is extremely difficult to administer and control. The development of political communities that were grounded in particular identities (that is, an identity that is ‘contained’ in the individual prior to the existence of that community) could therefore be seen as a reaction to this difficulty, where identities were seen to be much more stable. As I hope to have shown by now, however, this notion is equally problematic, exclusionary, and unstable. What I delve


into here, therefore, is what I see to be emerging as the theoretical ‘next step’: theorizing the impossibility of community. This can take many forms, and here I choose to focus on the ways in which Esposito, Nancy, Derrida, Rancière and Badiou each tackle this (im)possibility.

At the end of this chapter, I return to “liberté, égalité, fraternité, ou la mort,” to complete my discussion of its significance to this project by focusing on the significance of ‘ou la mort,’ both on its own and in its modern absence from France’s official Republican motto. ‘Ou la mort’ has a significant role to play in the politics of supplementarity that I outline in chapter 5 through its role as both void and surplus. ‘Ou la mort’ turns this otherwise benign list of political ideals into a war cry; it is what ‘activates’ the slogan, what (paradoxically) gives it its revolutionary life force. But how does it do this? Is ‘ou la mort’ a constitutive void or is it the surplus that causes politics to erupt? To begin by drawing upon Rancière’s formula, I argue that the ‘ou’ of ‘ou la mort’ also signifies a constitutive void: it represents as alternative the very impossibility or absence of an alternative, and thus is responsible for the creation of the political space in which revolution becomes possible. This is, therefore, not a reference to the role of ‘death’ in the regulatory processes of political life (in the case of biopolitics, death is certainly figured as surplus). Instead, the void is produced as an effect of the phrase taken in its entirety – ‘or death’ – as a place holder, an impossible alternative to a particular manner of living which has itself become impossible. That is to say, it tells us that there simply is no alternative to ‘liberty, equality, fraternity’ as a way of life that is not impossible.

Turning the opposite approach, where ‘ou la mort’ is figured as surplus, we can begin to think about it as a concept in excess of itself. Similarly, there is a certain sense in which any engagement in democratic politics represents a search for the ‘truth’ of democracy, a
truth that is in excess of any lived experience of democracy. In this sense, ‘ou la Mort’ perhaps finds its most powerful effects in excess of its practical meaning: I argue that it is possible that ‘ou la Mort’ represents precisely this specter of the ‘truth’ of democracy, this specter of the Other lurking ‘outside the frame’ as it were, emerging simultaneously with the declaration of ‘Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité’ but not captured by it. In Rancière’s work, for example, this is evident in definitions of politics, democracy and equality; in Nancy’s work, the ‘truth’ of democracy takes the form of a democratic ‘spirit’; in Derrida’s work, we see it in the ‘democracy to come’ and his notion of autoimmunity; and in Badiou’s work, this excess circulates in his notion of the Event through his discussion of fidelity and of politics as a ‘truth procedure.’ Ultimately, in investigating death as void and as surplus, we uncover a trace of the undecidable. Going forward into the following chapter, I argue that these examples, as well as the original of ‘ou la mort’ as both void and excess, capture the logic of the supplement: it is “an inessential extra, added to something complete in itself, but… added in order to complete, to compensate for a lack in what was supposed to be complete in itself.”

(i) From Fraternité to Communitas: The Crisis of Coexistence

Fraternity is a paradoxical concept. Even when compared to freedom and equality, the concept of fraternity is the most ambivalent and thus also the most difficult to institutionalize. Fraternity shines a light on a sense of the political that does not concern itself with the complexities of justice, disputes or demands. At the same time, however, the promise of universality that is the driving force behind the demand for fraternity in the

revolutionary slogan is repeatedly weakened and redefined during the revolutionary period, “suggesting a permanent state of contingency that forecloses fraternity’s exclusively universalizing claims.”427 The revolutionary potential that was believed to be contained within ‘fraternal ties,’ therefore, was “invariably conjunctural rather than universal, overdetermined more by ‘extreme situations’ than by normative assumptions, and so shaped by exigencies and not demands.”428 In other words, the inherent Christian influence upon the understanding of fraternity circulating at the time was gradually being eroded and replaced by an understanding of these bonds that is closer to what we have come to call identity politics. This move is representative of the shift in the way we form social bonds from the fraternal to the communal. Although we have largely cast off its literal familial limits and extended its scope, recasting fraternity in terms of the more modern term ‘community’ has not had the effect of universalizing that scope. The bonds of community are by definition strictly limited, both in terms of who is counted within it and how far the reach of those bonds can extend. Although communities are based on shared values and goals, those values and goals in that specific configuration are generally limited to that community; this notion of community thus implies a necessary tension between loyalties that are constructed within that community and any kind of loyalty to society at large be it national identity or a fidelity to some notion of ‘the people.’ This tension boils down to a tension between conflicting levels of identity.

Traditionally, fraternity was seen as a means to the ends of freedom and equality. Aristotle, for example, famously viewed man as a ‘political animal’ who required a civic identity for his perfection. The modern understanding of fraternity, which is arguably a

428 Ibid.
product of the various calls for liberty, equality and fraternity in republican revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries, turns this relation on its head. The belief that freedom and equality are the precursors to fraternity or community has consigned community to become the distant goal of political action rather than the starting point. I will note here, however, that this relation unfolds in this manner only from the perspective of political action at the level of government. Governmental policies and programs are structured around the belief that freedom and equality are precursors to community, which is arguably the legacy of the social contract. From the perspective of activism aimed at resistance, however, the relation is deployed in its prior form, where community forms the basis for collective action, which in turn is aimed at opening up spaces for freedom and equality to be realized.

The relation between identity formation and community has a long and fraught history within the various discourses of critical theory, accused from various perspectives of being too culturally focused, too romanticized, too alienating, and/or too essentializing. The theme that unites these perspectives has been the call for a radical rethinking of the ways in which community is understood, how it is constituted, its role in identity formation, and how it is deployed in political discourse. However drastically they may vary in their responses, the most prevalent critiques of community, whether Marxist, postcolonial or post-structural, are united in the first instance by the demand that we must challenge any understanding of community that is premised upon closure, continuity, unity and/or a universalism which engenders exclusionary violence. Specifically, they reject the characterization of community as a unified, continuous and enclosed collectivity. This kind of understanding of community not only forecloses upon other possible modes of collectivization and/or intersubjective relations, but as I previously discussed, also requires a ‘founding violence’ for its formation and it ultimately seeks a place for itself within existing hierarchies of identification rather
than working to dismantle them. This critique is directly linked to the kind of thinking Esposito illustrates in *Communitas*, as we will see shortly.

Moreover, the creation of something like a ‘national community’ requires that its members turn a blind eye to the complex networks of power relations at work in the creation of that very community. In *Imagined Communities*, for example, Benedict Anderson argues that the national community is “always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship [...] regardless of the actual inequalities and exploitation that may prevail.”\(^{429}\) To reference the preceding section of this chapter, we see here a deep connection between this understanding of community and the kind of egalitarianism that modern democracies have to offer: the creation of a national identity produces a collectivity that is premised upon an undifferentiated sense of ‘belonging’ to the nation, which can only be produced by insulating itself against those inconsistencies and contradictions which paradoxically constitute the ‘need’ for the creation of such a community. What we see emerge in a globalized world is the seemingly irresolvable tension between, on one hand, the demand for a single narrative under which we can unite, and on the other, the demand for more pluralism – or, the demand for equality and the demand for liberty. What complicates matters most is that these demands are often made simultaneously.

Though Anderson’s work was focused on nationalism in particular, his assertion that the imagination has a powerful role to play in the formation and maintenance of community extends far beyond national identity. In times when the bonds of fraternity were much more literal and communities were formed based on familial or clan ties, the imagination had less of a role to play (though it certainly still had its place in forming bonds based on ritual, for example). Modern political communities, having very little to do with blood relationships,

rely much more heavily on the imagination. The process of forming communities along these lines appeals to the phenomenology of aesthetic experience that we have touched upon in Kant’s work. The subject in this case, for example, imaginatively relates various aspects of identity to one another and perceives them as having unity or cohesion, imbuing this community with a ‘spirit of fraternity’ in the absence of any actual familial bond. My mind keeps returning to Merleau-Ponty’s ‘cohesion without concept’ here, by which he translates Kant’s aesthetic notion of ‘knowledge without concept’ to the fields of phenomenology and ontology through a philosophy of embodied thought, or what Merleau-Ponty himself calls ‘sensible ideas.’ This is essentially the meaning of ‘visible and invisible’ for Merleau-Ponty, that the worlds of the sensible and of ideas are inextricably intertwined. In the case of national identity, we can see this thinking ring true: in order for national identity to truly take hold in a population and have its desired effect, the people must take this notion of being a ‘part’ of the nation quite literally, where the idea of nationhood/place is taken into the body and written in the blood, and where the body is seen as a part of a larger ‘national body.’ We come to see a similar role played by the imagination in the work of Nancy through ‘mythical thinking,’ where he argues that modern community formation is driven by a nostalgia for an idealized past that did not actually exist. In *The Inoperative Community*, Nancy argues that there is nothing more ‘common’ to the members of a community than myth. “Myth and community are defined by each other, at least in part – but perhaps in totality – and this motivates a reflection on community according to myth.”

I believe that the most salient issues upon which to focus here are those of how we understand the relations between identity and community, between community and ethics,

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431 Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 42.
and between community and politics. The most widely shared definition of a community is that it is a group of people who identify with one another as holding something in common (values, identity, norms, etc.). Community is, first and foremost, a social condition.

‘Community’ posthumously names the group after its formation, but does not itself refer to the ‘thing’ that is held in common nor the individuals who make up the group. To preface my discussion of Derrida’s reading of Kant in chapter 5, the word community names the ‘frame’ itself rather than the work. The focus in our generic definitions of community tends to fall upon the rhetoric of inclusion, on who and what is included or what is held in common that brings people together to share in that or those particular aspects of identity or interest, rather than upon the condition of ‘distinctness’ or enclosure that it names. Like the notions of liberty and equality I discussed in the previous chapter, the ways in which fraternity and community are deployed within modern democracies remain grounded first and foremost in a particular understanding of joint possession.

This is not to say, however, that we feel we can ‘possess’ community. The link between community and possession is twofold: first, we form communities upon something we believe we possess, such as a particular identity, belief or interest. Because we believe we possess it, we believe we can share it (or our experiences related to it) with others. Second, insofar as community names a group rather than each individual belonging to the group, community comes to possess the individual or to ‘hold’ or suspend that individuality in exchange for a sense of belonging to or possessed by a community. Thus, much like the philosophical forms of freedom and equality (as opposed to the politicized forms of ‘liberty’ and ‘equivalence’), fraternity also stands counter to the ideals of liberal democracy, insofar as these bonds are supposed to exceed or supersede both the individual/particular and the universal. The way in which these bonds are politicized within modern democracies has
removed much of the focus on blood and family (or at least ‘ politicized’ these notions) and shifted community formation to focus on choice. This amounts to and relies upon the democratization of identity itself, whereby the bonds of ‘fraternity’ are no longer something pre-determined or inherited, but rather something that we are equally and freely able to choose, whereby community has become a social ‘right’ that we are free to exercise rather than a genealogical determination. This is not to say that being able to choose to belong to a community is a bad thing; to the contrary, in this case, democratization is a positive development insofar as it has opened new possibilities for groups of people to come together. What modern critics tend to disapprove of is that other aspect of community formation that has remained constant throughout the shift from blood ties to the in-common, where the formation of community is premised upon closure, continuity, unity and/or a universalism which inevitably engenders a founding violence whereby non-members are excluded or ‘othered’ through its formation.432 What we will come to see in a moment, however, is that this line of critique is also problematic.

First, however, this is where I would like to trace the dialectical relation between community and immunity in the work of Roberto Esposito, which is focused on the effect of community upon its members rather than on those who are excluded. First and foremost, Esposito asks whether the relation between these terms is rooted in opposition or if the relation is reciprocal, where the logics of community and immunity are each written into the other. In order to approach this question, he focuses his initial discussion around the principles upon which communities are formed. First, he discusses the common, or that

which belongs instead to all and is therefore ‘public’ as opposed to private, and ‘general’ (but also collective) in contrast to particular.”

He goes on, however, to work through three more meanings of *communitas*, the analysis of which is rooted in the etymology of the word stemming from the Latin *munus*: obligation (*onus*), office (*officium*), and gift (*donum*).

With particular emphasis on the latter, Esposito is careful to point out that this is not just any gift, but a kind of gift that implies or even demands an exchange. In his own words, “once one has accepted the *munus*, one is obliged to return the *onus*, in the form of either goods or services (*officium*).” Crucially, the *munus* signifies “the gift that one gives, not the gift that one receives,” “the contractual obligation one has vis-à-vis the other,” and “the gratitude that demands new donations” (from the recipient).

The circulation of reciprocity in this relation creates an absence – that left by the gift itself – which becomes a debt, which in turn radically alters our perceptions of identity. In other words, accepting the *munus* by entering into community effectively deprives the individual of the ability to identify as anything other than a member of the community.

Although immunity usually denotes protection from an external threat, in Esposito’s work it is also inscribed within the *munus*, signifying an exception from the obligation of reciprocity. Immunity is held up as the means through which the individual is protected against the “expropriative effects” of community, particularly the aforementioned loss of individual identity.

Immunity thus connotes not being and not having in common. The result is the reconstruction of a separation between the individual and the community, which in turn protects the community from the creation of an excess of communal debt. Esposito

*Esposito, Communitas*, xii.
concludes that in order to survive, “a community, every community is forced to introject the negativity of its own opposite, even if that opposite remains a contrastive and lacking mode of the community itself.”

Timothy Campbell notes that it is precisely this inscription of immunity into community (and vice versa) that forms the basis for Esposito’s understanding of modern biopolitics. In Campbell’s reading, Esposito demonstrates that the “idea of the modern subject who enjoys civil and political rights is itself an attempt to attain immunity from the contagion of the possibility of community.” Yet inasmuch as this immunization is meant to protect the individual, he continues, “such an attempt to immunize the individual from what is common ends up putting the community at risk as immunity turns upon itself and its constitutive element.”

Community’s function as an insulating force is less often spoken about outside of philosophical discussions than its unifying promise. Sometimes this is done in the name of security, as in the formation of a national community which serves to present a unified people within a specific territory under a particular government ready to, among other things, defend that territory against external threats. Related to security is self-protection, where marginalized groups come together in order to have their voices heard. Sometimes communities are named simply in order to group an otherwise radically diverse group of people under one name in order to talk about them ‘in general,’ for example ‘the academic community,’ ‘the scientific community,’ ‘the LGBT community,’ ‘the Latin community,’ etc., the obvious danger here being that it rarely possible to universalize anything about an otherwise diverse group of individuals without alienating members of that same group.

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439 Ibid., 49.
440 Timothy Campbell, “Bios, Immunity, Life,” *diacritics* 36, no. 2 (Summer, 2006): 4. I return to biopolitics in Esposito’s work in chapter 5. Campbell also notes that what really sets Esposito’s work on community as a shared nothingness apart from thinkers such as Nancy and Alphonso Lingis is his insistence that immunity is a historical category that is bound up in modernity. (5)
441 Ibid., 4-5.
442 Ibid., 5.
Perhaps the greatest paradox of community is that people choose to identify with a particular community based on something they share in common, surrendering some of their individuality precisely because they want to distinguish themselves in a particular way from society at large. Through community, we uncover the irresistible potential to become ‘other than other,’ specifically in the sense that individuals who had previously been invisible or inaudible to society at large become able to force their appearance in the distribution of the sensible, making their voices heard. Returning to Todd May’s example of the lunch counter sit-ins of the American civil rights movement, if it had only been a single individual trying to ‘appear’ as it were, it would not have been effective, but since there were groups sitting in who were part of a larger community of resistance, the power in numbers ultimately aided in forcing that recognition.

With regard to the critique mentioned above, we can now see the problem come into focus: in general, the most important effect that the civil rights movement had was to give voice to those who previously hadn’t had one, to allow marginalized groups to ‘appear’ in new ways, both in the eyes of society at large and under the law. Those of us who share the view that racism has no place in the modern world agree that this is a universally good change. In light of the critique of community formation as an act of closure, which inevitably engenders a founding violence whereby those non-members are excluded or ‘othered’ through its formation, however, the fact remains that this is not avoided; the reason we don’t have a problem with it is that those voices that were silenced (or at least relegated to the margins) in this case were those who were formerly able to be openly racist and exclusionary. Although I do not wish to delve into a debate about free speech, or consider whether perhaps certain voices ought to be silenced, what I am seeking to demonstrate here is that the relation between politics and community formation contains a vital ethical
component that is otherwise absent from our discussions of identity and politics thus far. Small ‘p’ politics (or police, or the situation, etc.) does not itself generate ethical claims; its function is to normalize, institutionalize and bureaucratize them. The political (politics, event, etc.), however, is also devoid of ethics insofar as there is never a promise that things will ‘get better’ when the political erupts on the scene, only a promise that things will be different. The implication that different is better comes from the bias of the critic, not from the political itself. I argue that community is the place where ethics enters the political scene, through intersubjectivity, wherever subjects have joined together based on shared identity. This ethical component can be said to contain both the danger and the saving power for community.\textsuperscript{443}

Its danger, as highlighted perhaps most clearly by Nancy, lies in the modern human tendency to long for a harmonious community based in shared identity that so often leads to violent conflict. Accompanying this longing for harmony we also see the pervasive nostalgia for an idealized fictional past that is constructed anew by each generation. In an interview he gave shortly after Derrida’s death, Nancy remarked:

\textsuperscript{443} This is, of course, a reference to Heidegger’s understanding of enframing in “The Question Concerning Technology.”
It’s true that Derrida was very apprehensive about any kind of communitarian theme; he did not like that word *community*, which I had begun to use (again), and he criticized the word *fraternity* in Blanchot, Lévinas, and in my own work. I did not agree with him in this and I wished to continue the debate. I believe he was mistaken regarding *fraternity*. But, as for *community*, I ended up having to recognize its ambiguities, and none of the “communitarianisms” of today have encouraged me to take it back up! That is why I ended up preferring to speak of being with, and Derrida himself agreed to speak of the with (*l’avec*).444

Derrida, and eventually Nancy, agreed that politics (and the political) had to be rethought apart from community in order to leave behind all of the outmoded religious and political connotations it carries with it.

The saving power potentially comes, on the other hand, in this shift toward thinking post-foundationally. In shifting our understanding of ethics (in line with our shifting understandings of politics, subjectivity, and community), for example, from a system of closed universals located in a mythical past toward seeing ethics as instead bound up in responsibility, in ‘being-toward-another,’ and in contingency, where we talk about the ‘sense’ of ethics rather than its universality, and thus see ourselves as playing a key role in its coming-into-being. This kind of ethics ‘from the bottom up’ acknowledges its dependence upon intersubjective relations, offering insight into our relations with others as well as personal and group identities specifically. At the same time that we begin to think a politics without foundation (or uncover what was beneath its perceived foundation), then, it is imperative to recognize that this thinking is not only reserved for the thinking of politics, but for thought in general. It is rooted in an ontology that can be best described as *relational*,

affirming nothing more or less than the interdependence of self, other and world, without ascribing a final ground or ultimate foundation to these relations or the individual concepts.\textsuperscript{445}

In this section, I look to Rancière’s rejection of the roles of identity and community in politics, Nancy’s ‘inoperative’ community, Derrida’s related understanding of ‘community’ (community under erasure), and Badiou’s (perhaps unwitting) notion of a community formed around truth in order to explore the thinking of community after foundationalism, or in deconstruction.

It should not come as a surprise that for Rancière, there is no ‘essence’ associated with the political (or politics, in his usage). Put another way, I can reasonably argue that if Rancière could be said to espouse any kind of political ontology (which he himself would deny), it is a paradoxical or negative one that reveals the logical impossibility of an essence underlying any social order. It is certainly the case that, for Rancière, there can be no social ontology. The case for whether or not his work can be said to contain a political ontology, however, is not quite as clear. On one hand, as mentioned above, politics in Rancière’s view is aimed at declassification, at revealing the absence or impossibility of essence. To posit that it itself contains an essence (other than the negative one described above) seems to miss the point. On the other hand, however, his insistence upon the presupposition of equality as the necessary precondition for both politics and political subjectivity suggests that an ontology is present. More specifically, this ontology might find its expression in the underlying contingency that is the constant companion of politics throughout his writings.\textsuperscript{446}

It is not my aim here to prove this position one way or another, so for now, I will adhere to the first position that Rancière successfully avoids creating a political ontology, and

\textsuperscript{445} I believe that the ontologies put forth by thinkers such as Nancy and Maurice Merleau-Ponty are examples of a similar kind of ‘relational’ ontology.

he works to demonstrate this position in his discussion of the social. In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, for example, Rancière constructs a social metaphor using the law of gravity, whereby he proposes that within the social realm, objects always end up in their proper places. The effect that is produced by this notion of the gravitational arrangement of objects is a picture of society as harmonious and ordered. Through the intervention of the political (politics), however, the logical impossibility of an essence or ontology of the social that lurks just below the surface of this harmonious order is revealed. During periods of stability, there is identity and even community, but the moment of the political is the only thing that creates political subjectivities: political agents are acting subjects who are devoid of identity, of essence, becoming both universal and particular. Whereas people viewed as ‘social’ bodies are bound together, as political subjects they are almost juxtaposed, bearing no such clear connection to one another with the exception of the presupposition of their equality. It is in precisely this sense that Rancière argues that anything like a political community is impossible.

Turning now to Nancy, we encounter an approach to community that is explicitly ontological, though as we will come to see, not entirely incompatible with that of Rancière, despite their striking methodological differences. Nancy’s Singular Plural ontology, despite its complexity, is nevertheless not paradoxical. Nancy does not privilege unity or multiplicity. As Christopher Watkin explains, “just as Nancy refuses the dichotomy of same and other by making them both contingent on the open ‘self’ (*soi*) from which they derive,” he also “refuses the dichotomy of one and many for a being-in-common, a singular plurality

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447 Jacques Rancière, “The Law of Gravity,” in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 76-79. This metaphor of objects falling to their proper places is strongly reminiscent of Aristotle’s theories of justice and nature.
without which there would be neither unity nor multiplicity.” Nancy is therefore not reordering this hierarchy, but *suspending* it, further warning us that “fragmentation can, if we are not careful, become the reverse (and therefore the twin) of totalization.” Put very simply, ‘Being’ figured as ‘singular plural’ means exactly what it says: Being is singular plural. *Being Singular Plural* is the text in which Nancy develops this ontology most fully, but its fundaments are present elsewhere in Nancy’s earlier works, perhaps most notably in *The Inoperative Community*, to which we will turn in a moment. In *Being Singular Plural*, Nancy is careful to clarify that ‘being singular plural’ must be articulated in precisely that way, “because none of these three terms precedes or grounds the other, [and because] each designates the coessence of the others.” He explains this notion of ‘coessence’ using the example of hyphenation, where “being-Singular Plural” written in this way locates this essence in the hyphen itself, “which is a mark of union and also a mark of division, a mark of sharing that effaces itself, leaving each term to its isolation and its being-with-the-others.” Nancy goes on to state that this is not an “ontology of society” as such, but rather that ontology itself is an originary “sociality.”

Critics of Nancy’s understanding of community usually take issue with his insistence upon finitude as what lies at the heart of any community (or any being), which, they argue, renders his work incapable of properly approaching the question of identity. He later, of course, nullified this line of critique when he published *Identity*, but more than this, I believe

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449 Ibid.
450 Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 37. This is specifically opposed to formulations such as ‘being is singular and plural,’ for example.
451 Ibid., 37.
452 Ibid., 37-38.
that this criticism misses a key feature of Nancy’s understanding of community. There are few moments in Nancy’s discussion of the singular plural where he explicitly discusses political community, but where he does, it is in relation to sovereignty (and not identity) as the concept out of which these communities are born. He begins this discussion by calling for a radical re-articulation of the relation between politics and philosophy:

> It can no longer be a matter of a single community, of its essence, closure, and sovereignty; by contrast, it can no longer be a matter of organizing community according to the decrees of a sovereign Other, or according to the telos [fins] of a history. It can no longer be a matter of treating sociability as a regrettable and inevitable accident, as a constraint that has to be managed in some way or another. Community is bare, but it is imperative.\(^{454}\)

First, he argues that political community can no longer be thought in pre-modern terms, as these small, closed, self-governing units bound together by blood and territory. Second, he argues that the modern version of political community, one that is rooted in some form of social contract, is also no longer viable. In this modern (liberal) formulation, sociability is seen as the accidental by-product of gathering people together under a sovereign in order to guarantee and protect our rights, and it becomes the responsibility of this sovereign body to regulate and manage this sociability as well. In other words, in this formulation, sociability ‘happens’ because we are together, but we are not together in the first instance for the sake of sociality. Nancy argues that sovereignty is the defining element of each of these forms of community, where sovereignty is understood as containing both its own foundation and its own end.\(^{455}\) Turning this understanding of sovereignty on its head, Nancy immediately asks

\(^{454}\) Ibid., 35-36.
\(^{455}\) For further reading on Nancy and the interplay of finitude, sovereignty and community, please see Maria del Rosario Acosta López, “‘An infinite task at the heart of finitude’: Jean-Luc Nancy on Community and History,”
the question, “what becomes of sovereignty when it is revealed that it is nothing but a
singularly plural spacing? How is one to think sovereignty as the ‘nothing’ of the ‘with’ that
is laid bare?” What I believe he is asking us to do here is to reimagine sovereignty in terms
of his notion of being-with, where sovereignty becomes merely one mode among many
through which the sharing and distribution of singular plural beings, of their simultaneous
union and division, takes place. In other words, what happens when we refuse sovereignty’s
domination as the singular structuring principle of community?

I believe that Rancière is asking virtually the same question, albeit in a different way.
His answer, as we have seen, is that ‘politics’ is what happens; namely, the presupposition of
equality that is the precondition for politics takes the place of the presupposition of
sovereignty that arguably, accidentally or not, is the foundation of the social. Nancy’s answer
is understandably different. He requires a further move, where we begin to think political
sovereignty as being simultaneously ‘with’ and ‘against’ domination. This ‘bare
sovereignty,’ which he compares to Bataille’s understanding of sovereignty as the moment of
‘unknowing,’ presupposes that one must distance oneself from the ‘politics-philosophical
order.’ This is not to distance oneself from politics, but rather to be able to trace the ‘retreat
of the political,’ which we can recall is the way in which the ontological presupposition(s)
which underlie the whole politico-philosophical order, withdraw and are replaced by a
‘givenness’ into which politics collapses. In this case regarding the social, then, what must be
retraced is the retreat of the ontological condition of ‘being-with’ that has been

CR: The New Centennial Review 17, no. 3 (Winter, 2017): 21-42; Ana Luszczynska, “The Opposite of the
Concentration Camp: Nancy’s Vision of Community,” CR: The New Centennial Review 5, no. 3 (Winter,
2005): 167-205; and Henk Oosterling, “From Interests to Inter-esse: Jean-Luc Nancy on Deglobalization and
456 Ibid., 36.
457 Bataille’s notion of sovereignty requires that it be understood apart from what Nancy terms the politico-
philosophical order, insofar as the sovereign moment consists in surrendering to the immediacy of a particular
desire in a moment where thought and calculation are temporarily suspended. Bataille discusses this notion of
sovereignty most clearly in part 3 of The Accursed Share and in The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge.
overshadowed by a particular understanding of sovereignty through which community is presupposed as something that happens after and in the wake of sovereignty and is ultimately determined by sovereignty. “The retreat of the political,” Nancy argues, is therefore “the uncovering, the ontological laying bare of being-with.”

Though no one would accuse Nancy of espousing a ‘negative ontology’ in the same sense that is recognized in Rancière, when we look to Nancy’s work on politics and community in *The Inoperative Community, Being Singular Plural, The Sense of the World* and *Retreating the Political*, he defines the ‘essence’ of the political and of community as the retreat of essence itself. Let us recall that, according to Nancy, the political appears in the ‘wake’ of politics as an event. In other words, what is fundamental to Nancy’s understanding of community is that it begins from a place in which we no longer think community in terms of its being structured or formed around an essence, a common identity or common concern. Community cannot be founded upon any ideal of essence, fusion or collective production. This kind of thinking ‘closes’ the political through the assumption of a ‘common being’ (or ‘being common’) through which “it loses the with or the together that defines it.” The condition of possibility for both cultural and political activity is a new understanding of community, not as “a grouping of individuals already consumed in the reproduction of a static totality based on identity,” but as “something that is enacted through contingent modalities of spacing.” Nancy’s notion of ‘spacing’ introduces an interruption, that element of dislocation through which “community itself becomes the enactment of dislocation.” Nancy posits a community that is immanently and constantly engaged in its

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460 Ibid., *preface*, xxxix.
461 Ibid., 25.
462 Ibid., 25.
own *unworking*, that is, “a community consciously undergoing the experience of its sharing,”
what he later comes to call *communication*. The political, then, comes to designate for
Nancy the ‘disposition’ of community as such. It is the ‘clear consciousness’ of community.

Referring as he often does to Bataille, Nancy identifies him as having been the first to
experience community in Nancy’s terms, “as neither a work to be produced, nor a lost
communion, but rather as space itself, and the spacing of the experience of the outside, of the
outside-of-self.” Community is understood as the experience of the dislocation of the
outside-of-self, or the experience of forgetting oneself. Nancy identifies the most important
part of this experience as having been the necessity of a ‘clear consciousness’ of separation.
Nancy calls this the “clear consciousness of the communal *night,*” which is a consciousness
operating at the *limit* of what we understand as consciousness:

> [It is] consciousness at the extremity of consciousness that is also the
> suspension of Hegelian desire (of consciousness’s desire for recognition), the
> finite interruption of infinite desire, and the infinite syncope of finite desire
> (sovereignty itself: desire outside desire and mastery outside itself) – this
> “clear” consciousness, then, cannot take place elsewhere than in community,
> or rather it can only take place as the communication of community: both as
> what communicates within community, and as what community
> communicates.\(^{465}\)

Nancy identifies three features of ‘clear consciousness’: the separation of consciousness from
the desire for recognition by others and for self-recognition, separation from the endless
pursuit of desire (in Lacanian terms, the infinite movement of *l’objet a*), and the infinite
‘forgetting’ of desire or mastery coming from the ‘outside.’ This clear consciousness could

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\(^{463}\) Ibid., 40.
\(^{464}\) Ibid., 19.
\(^{465}\) Ibid., 19.
never be experienced from the position of the individual. Nancy calls the experience of this consciousness ‘ecstasy,’ specifically in the sense that such a consciousness cannot belong to an individual; it can only be had in and through community.\textsuperscript{466} Community is not itself a subject and does not take the subject’s place.\textsuperscript{467} It does not itself ‘possess’ this consciousness: “community is the ecstatic consciousness of the night of immanence [consciousness at the limit of consciousness], insofar as such a consciousness is the interruption of self-consciousness.”\textsuperscript{468} In Nancy’s view, then, our traditional understandings of community as being rooted in some form of identity directly contradict this notion of ‘clear consciousness.’

Traditional understandings of community are better explained through the concept of fraternity, a process of universalization that works to efface difference in the production of a homogenous ‘us’ which is wholly created in and through self-consciousness, the desire for recognition, etc.

Nancy thus implicitly draws a distinction between fraternity and what he calls community, which we can see in his characterization of fraternity as the bearer of myth, and of community as the interruption of myth.\textsuperscript{469} Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe define myth and the role it plays in community formation clearly where they write:

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{466} Ibid., 19.
\item \textsuperscript{467} For an \textit{excellent} read on Nancy’s understanding of the subject, and one to which I return in the following chapter, please see Jeffrey S. Librett, “On an Intermittent Subject in Jean-Luc Nancy,” \textit{diacritics} 42, no. 2 (2014): 36-58.
\item \textsuperscript{468} Nancy, \textit{The Inoperative Community}, 19.
\item \textsuperscript{469} He discusses this idea in many places, but the two most in-depth discussions of the relation between community and myth can be found in “Myth Interrupted” in \textit{The Inoperative Community} as cited above, and in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Nazi Myth,” trans. Brian Holmes, in \textit{Critical Inquiry} 16, no. 2 (Winter, 1990): 291-312.
\end{enumerate}
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Myth is a fiction, in the strong, active sense of ‘fashioning,’ or, as Plato says, of ‘plastic art’: it is, therefore, a *fictioning*, whose role is to propose, if not to impose, models or types […], types in imitation of which an individual, or a city, or an entire people, can grasp themselves and identify themselves.”

Myth, or more specifically the ‘fictioning’ that myth performs, provides the foundation for both personal and group identities. The *interruption* of myth, on the other hand, makes it impossible for us to propose or represent a common origin and turn it into an identity. The interruption of myth does not make it disappear; the interruption forecloses upon the possibility of this narrative becoming the foundation for communal belonging. Because the very notion of fraternity rests upon the notion of a common origin, the loss of that common origin makes it impossible for people to recognize one another in this way. As Marie-Eve Morin writes in “Putting Community Under Erasure,” the interruption of myth does not build community, “it un-works it, that is, it lest a space open in the identification of the community with itself. This un-working is the active incompleteness of community: it prevents the community from effecting itself as work.”

To a large extent, one could argue that Derrida’s *The Politics of Friendship* and Nancy’s *Inoperative Community* undertake similar projects, although they have different strategies in achieving this end. Specifically, as Morin points out, while Derrida engages in the deconstruction of fraternity and Nancy engages in the interruption of myth, the end is

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470 Ibid., 297.
472 Marie-Eve Morin, “Putting Community Under Erasure,” *Culture Machine*, 8:0 (January 2004), II. https://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/view/37/45 (accessed December 20, 2016)*There are no page numbers associated with this online text, so I have included the section numbers in my citations.
nevertheless the same: putting community under erasure. For Derrida, the deconstructive path to the crossing-out of community necessarily involves rigorously questioning the concept of fraternity in The Politics of Friendship. Derrida identifies fraternity as a mode of identification. In this case, it is used to determine both who belongs to the community and who is excluded. Morin focuses on this double movement of ‘fraternization,’ specifically where Derrida identifies a ‘double violence’ that it exerts upon individuals. First, there is a violence that is enacted internally, which amounts to the homogenization of individuals in forming a group through universalization and/or the neutralization of difference. Second, there is a violence which is enacted externally and which is a direct result of the ‘oppositional logic’ of community. Put simply, the same process that allows me to identify my ‘brothers’ also allows me to identify those who are not included. In order to escape this double violence, Morin writes, “it is necessary, according to Derrida, to cut the bond that binds me to, or excludes me from, a group. Only then will there be an experience of the other, or a relation to the other, which will respect and do justice to its otherness, its difference.” We can now clearly see the connection between Nancy’s notion of ‘interrupting myth’ and Derrida’s deconstruction of fraternity: in each case, despite their methodological differences, the necessity of doing away with the notion of a ‘common origin’ or ‘essence’ that would be associated with community is apparent.

The idea of ‘putting community under erasure’ involves removing community from its metaphysical interpretation as essence or presence, and thinking community in a way that does not rely on such an essence and thus does not become “an identifiable totality which

\[473\] Ibid., III.
\[474\] Because of the complex and lengthy treatment of fraternity in this text, I defer to Morin’s concise reading in the spirit of the ‘community under erasure’ as it relates directly to the context of this section.
\[475\] Morin, ”Putting Community Under Erasure,” II.
\[476\] Ibid., II.
\[477\] Ibid., II.
receives its meaning and determination from a transcendental signified, be it race, birth, gender, etc. For Derrida, this means ‘crossing out’ the concept and the word itself, which would appear in this way: community. For example, when the word ‘community’ does appear in his texts, he is (almost) always careful to neutralize it either “through quotation marks or through the use of aporetical and undecidable sentences,” such as “‘community of those who don’t belong to any community,’ ‘community without community,’ ‘we who cannot completely say we,’ ‘we, if such a thing exists.’” The act of crossing-out a word and/or concept does not, however, obliterate it or the danger associated with it. The old word can still be seen under the mark of erasure, and thus the danger of forgetting the erasure and reverting to old systems remains. This, Morin argues, is why Derrida is so careful in his writing, repeatedly re-iterating the act of crossing-out. Derrida insists upon the deconstruction of the concept of community with the aim of severing it from its genealogical ties. This deconstruction, which radically calls the concept of community into question, is precisely what Derrida claims is missing from Nancy’s treatment of community. Nancy, on the other hand, believes that using the concept of community is unavoidable, and thus he uses his deconstructed notion of community (without quotation marks) to radically rethink the ontological condition of being-with.

Coming full-circle here, we can briefly discuss what impact these differing-yet-complementary notions of ‘community under erasure’ have on our thinking of the political community and of politics more generally. If we can recall Rancière’s position, politics (in

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478 Ibid., III.
479 Ibid., I. Morin notes that the first expression comes from Bataille, and the second comes from Blanchot. The reason that I say that he is ‘almost always’ careful to neutralize the term community is because there is a passage in Writing and Difference in the essay “Violence and Metaphysics” where he speaks of a ‘community of philosophers’ and a ‘community of the question.’ It is here that we can find the foundations for the notions of ‘responsibility’ and a relation to the other which precedes and exceeds politics that he discusses at length in The Politics of Friendship.
480 Ibid., I.
481 Ibid., I.
his understanding of the term) is what strips away this notion of essence or origin. What we become, through the presupposition of equality, is a singular plural group who share in the capacity for thought and who universally presuppose the equality of each with every one. We can think of equality as the condition of plurality here and political subjectivity as the condition of singularity. What is important to note here is that in Rancière’s view, both equality and subjectivity, that is, both plurality and singularity, are simultaneous with or products of politics. They do not preexist politics, nor do they exist independently of it. Despite the power of politics to strip away communal ties rooted in identity, what is created is not a ‘community under erasure.’ Rancière’s political community represents only a partial ‘retreat of the political,’ in that politics does not ultimately expose us to any kind of formless, unstructured being-together. Certain transcendental signifiers do indeed retreat, but they are replaced by equality. I am sure that some would argue that this equality is a form of naked communal existence, yet it is Rancière’s own insistence that his work does not contain a political ontology that makes me hesitant to agree. Nancy’s project, by contrast, is overtly an ontology of being-with. Through it, he describes in detail that we are (and the way we are) singular plural with others and with the world. In his work, he interrogates the ontological presuppositions of all political thought: the question of the political has always been about thinking and re-thinking the space in which our being-together takes place, and this question is put to us anew with each retreat of the political. The political is what binds us together under a transcendental signified, offering us an essence or origin through which singularity is effaced; the retreat of the political opens the space of possibility for the creation of a world in which singularity is once again exposed.

If Derrida seems not to offer us any kind of clear picture of what the community under erasure might look like, that is because the vast majority of his work on community is
aimed solely at its deconstruction. In *The Politics of Friendship*, however, we do get a glimpse into Derrida’s position in his concluding remarks (which of course, are yet another series of questions):

> Is it possible to think and to implement democracy, that which would keep the old name ‘democracy,’ while uprooting from it all these figures of friendship (philosophical and religious) which prescribe fraternity [...]? [...] Is it possible to open up to the ‘come’ of a certain democracy which is no longer an insult to the friendship we have striven to think beyond the homo-fraternal and phallogocentric schema? When will we be ready for an experience of freedom and equality that is capable of respectfully experiencing that friendship, which would at last be just, just beyond the law, and measured up against its measurelessness?\(^\text{482}\)

There are undeniably too many enormous questions here for us to be able to address each of them adequately. I believe that it is this series of questions at the end of *The Politics of Friendship* that fueled his subsequent writing of *Rogues*, where his notion of the democracy to come finds its greatest elaboration. I have already discussed Derrida’s view on the relation between democracy and sovereignty, where the plurality that democracy as such represents is counteracted by sovereignty, and where sovereignty is in turn counteracted by its inability to totalize or completely homogenize that plurality. Likewise, Derrida sees a similarly troubled relationship between equality and freedom that is also played out in the tension between singularity and totality. What is clear here (as it is for our other thinkers) is that freedom, equality and fraternity as they appear in democracy as it is currently practiced and understood are insufficient at best, and fatally flawed at worst. Derrida calls for an experience of freedom and equality through which we would be able to respectfully experience this just and

measureless friendship. This freedom, as I understand it, is freedom that acknowledges responsibility; equality is equality that acknowledges dissymmetry and infinite alterity. Both equality and freedom, then, would cultivate their own ‘autoimmunity.’ In other words, what Derrida is searching for, in line with Nancy and Rancière, is an understanding of freedom and equality (and implicitly, democracy and community) that withdraws from fraternity.

In *Conditions*, Badiou argues that “the word fraternity has, for its part, been repeated and sublated by the word community[.]* Specifically, Badiou argues that what we presently understand as community is descended from the ‘revolutionary fraternity’ that came to the surface at the outset of the French Revolution of 1789. The chapter entitled “Philosophy and Politics” stands as Badiou’s most focused and sustained critique of community, but the relation between community and politics seems to trouble Badiou throughout the entire body of his work. The critique of community that he espouses in *Conditions* is based on his apprehension about the fact that ‘community’ and ‘emancipatory politics’ have become indistinguishable, the danger being that the decline of one implies the decline of the other. This is, among other things, a critique of identity politics, which he would include under the heading of ‘reactionary politics.’ He argues that the word ‘community’ today denotes a form of “communitarianism by which the parliamentary state seeks to divide and delimit latent popular zones from their inconsistency.” He is pointing here to something we have already discussed, where there is a double-movement through which communities are formed around a generalization of some kind of essence (the ‘Muslim

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483 Ibid., 231-233.
485 Ibid., 148.
486 Being a relative newcomer to Badiou, it nevertheless appears to me through my research that earlier Badiou is apprehensive about the role of community in articulating an emancipatory politics, whereas the later Badiou seems to confirm the relation between community (specifically, communism) and emancipatory politics.
487 Badiou, *Conditions*, 172.
community,’ the ‘Gay community,’ the ‘Black community,’ etc.), a tendency that simultaneously ignores the Idea of community as well as the internal inconsistency of the group. While my discussion of identity politics was focused around a critique of this notion of ‘essence’ that ultimately silences people, ignores differences and reinforces those understandings of equality and freedom that are attached to modern democratic practice, Badiou is not interested in the philosophy of difference. What matters to him are truths.\footnote{Ibid., 172.} If, in his (early) understanding of the term, community is associated with what we have been calling identity politics, and thus with the demonstration of a particular communitarian ‘sense’ (and thus also consensus, communication, ‘knowledge’), it is therefore also associated with the State. Politics, on the other hand, “puts the State at a distance.”\footnote{Badiou, \textit{Metapolitics}, 145.} 

The other aspect of his critique of community that bears direct relevance to my discussion here revolves around the notion of the ‘impossibility’ of community. In \textit{Conditions}, Badiou begins this line of critique with the popular proposition (put forth by, among others, practitioners of identity politics) that the terms ‘emancipatory politics’ and ‘community’ have become transposable. To make matters worse, he argues, we have come to take for granted the ‘impossibility’ of community in several different ways from a number of different perspectives, and if this is indeed the case, the outlook for politics is bleak. The crux of his argument is as follows: if we have come to understand community as the modern form and basis of emancipatory politics, then thinking the ‘impossibility’ of community necessarily implies the impossibility of emancipatory politics.\footnote{It is important to note here, however, that Badiou refutes this thesis a little later in the chapter (\textit{Conditions}, 151). Badiou’s contention that the impossibility of community does not necessarily imply the impossibility of politics is the basis for his argument that the word ‘community’ is in fact not suitable for grasping/describing the current state of emancipatory politics (Ibid., 171).} This ‘impossibility’ takes several forms at once. First, there is the \textit{demand} that we think community as impossible,
driven by critiques of presence, origin, totality and limit, made by certain postmodern/post-structural thinkers. He specifically cites Blanchot (‘the unavowable community’), Nancy (‘the inoperative community’), and Agamben (‘the coming community’).\textsuperscript{491} Second, he argues that the modern desire for ‘consensual consistency’ that is fulfilled in and through globalization (economic liberalism) and individualism (political liberalism) leaves little to no room for anything like community/communism.\textsuperscript{492} Third, he argues that the idea that “communities” exist, specifically those that are constructed in the name of a communal substance related to culture and race, runs directly counter to the “Idea” of community.\textsuperscript{493} Finally, Badiou argues that “real politics,” that is, politics as it is presented to us, effectively excludes every Idea.\textsuperscript{494} If ‘real politics’ is closed off to Ideas (such as community), then it is also closed to truth; where the production of truth becomes impossible, there can be no politics (in Badiou’s understanding of the term). Community is immobilized by its supposed impossibility, deprived of its capacity for truth production, and thus removed from politics altogether.

It is pertinent at this stage to pause in order to gain a better understanding of Badiou’s political subject, which is first and foremost, a collective entity. Backtracking a little bit, I’d like to first clarify from what position Badiou is posing the question of the subject in the first place. In the opening remarks of \textit{Being and Event}, Badiou lays out his position very clearly: “In a reversal of the Kantian question, it [is] no longer a matter of asking: ‘How is pure mathematics possible?’ and responding: thanks to the transcendental subject. Rather: pure mathematics being the science of being, how is a subject possible?”\textsuperscript{495} Since for the purposes

\textsuperscript{491} Badiou, \textit{Conditions}, 148.
\textsuperscript{492} Ibid., 149.
\textsuperscript{493} Ibid., 149. Identity politics is subsumed under this heading, and is thus complicit in the work of rendering community impossible.
\textsuperscript{494} Ibid., 149.
\textsuperscript{495} Badiou, \textit{Being and Event}, 6.
of this project we are leaving the mathematical side of things alone, it is sufficient to
understand this statement as arguing that we should understand the subject as something that
is created in and through a particular ontology rather than the other way around. Borrowing
from Lacan, Badiou proclaims that “the contemporary Subject is void, cleaved, a-substantial,
and ir-reflexive. Moreover, one can only suppose its existence in the context of particular
processes […]”\footnote{Ibid., 3.} The processes to which he refers are those truth-procedures that take place
within the fields of love, art, science and politics. In a much more recent text, Badiou argues
that the forces of global market capitalism have obfuscated these fields, attempting to replace
them with the fields of sexuality, culture, technology and management respectively.\footnote{Alain Badiou, \textit{Saint Paul}, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 12.} Rather
than leaving open the possibility for new truths to radically disrupt the situation, these other
fields serve to reinforce and strictly regulate the current situation. Sexuality, culture,
technology and management are rooted \textit{in} identity, constitutive \textit{of} identity, and garner
authority \textit{from} identity; the concept of truth is, importantly, none of these things.\footnote{Ibid., 14.} In stark
contrast to this, the conditions that Badiou has set forth – art, love, science and politics – are
what allow truths to unsettle the present situation and allow for the creation of a de-
territorialized space in which events and thus subjectivities become possible through fidelity
to the universality of that truth.

In “The Communist Hypothesis,” Badiou defines politics as “collective action,
organized by certain principles, that aims to unfold the consequences of a new possibility
which is currently repressed by the dominant order.”\footnote{Alain Badiou, “The Communist Hypothesis,” in \textit{New Left Review} 49 (January-February 2008): 31.} For Badiou, then, both politics and
political subjectivity are grounded in collectivity. Put another way, a collective subjectivity is
what defines an event as political in Badiou’s formulation. The political subject is a
The subject is created through the universalizing force of the political event, which effectively effaces what Badiou calls the “predicative particularity” of those previously territorialized individuals who now belong to the event. When a political event will have happened, the political sphere becomes a space of ‘the Same’ rather than one of the proliferation of differences. This sameness does not announce the arrival or creation of a totality, but rather acknowledges that we are all ‘the same’ in difference. I believe his thinking is that if we exist in a condition of infinite alterity and infinite multiplicity, the reification of difference becomes a meaningless endeavor. Since politics is, in part, defined as collective action and is the space of the collective subject, individuals exceed the limits of individual action and thus of individuality itself through their participation in politics.

Returning for a moment to *Conditions*, Badiou offers up ‘equality’ in place of ‘community’ as the philosophical name for the “compossibilization of emancipatory politics […] because equality neither designates nor presumes the advent of a totality,” and because it acknowledges that truth has no proper ‘sense.’ We can now come to understand the reason for his choice of equality over community, though arguably, in his later work he returns to a form of community (specifically, to communism) in association with equality as that which underpins his political project.

Ultimately, I believe that Badiou is unable to dissociate the notion of ‘community’ from what we have been calling identity politics, which for Badiou would be representative of the situation and of those false conditions produced by global market capitalism (sexuality, culture, technology, management). Identity politics is produced within and limited by a particular set of spatial, temporal and systematic constraints with which ‘true politics’ in

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500 This is contrasted with Badiou’s subject of love, for example, which is an individual.
502 Badiou, *Conditions*, 173. *As opposed to ‘sense,’ which in Badiou’s use refers to something perceptible, specific and finite, truth is described as indiscernible, generic and infinite.
Badiou’s understanding does not engage.^{503} Moreover, the truth-claims made by political subjects are singular rather than programmatic, and this singularity “represents no one in particular and engages whoever happens to be in the situation at any given time.”^{504} This statement reflects Badiou’s insistence that the relations between politics, truth and subjectivity have nothing to do with identity or with the notion of community that is rooted in identity. That is not to say that identity politics has never been a valuable vehicle for political action, but Badiou’s rejection of it suggests that it has become so focused on difference that it now contradicts his vision of the universal political subject. Like Rancière, Badiou requires that we must confront the impossibility of the social in order to approach the political; that only the rejection of this sense of ‘community’ can lay the foundation for collective political action. Jason Barker summarizes this notion of Badiou’s very well in his introduction to *Metapolitics*:

No ‘one’ can determine what is objectively good for a community. The fiction of political representation, in pretending to advance the interests of others, must therefore be swept aside in order to make way for the reality of political processes, for it is only then that a singular political sequence can begin to take shape. Political unbinding is therefore the creative act whereby subjects, in renouncing any outside interest (the so-called ‘exteriority’ of politics), break with routine and begin to empower themselves as collectives.^{505}

This ultimately means that, as Barker indicates, Badiou’s politics is aimed at stripping away “the fictions of political representation to the point where any distinction between real and

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^{503} There is a good discussion of this issue in Jason Barker’s introduction to *Metapolitics*. See: Jason Barker, translator’s introduction to *Metapolitics*, xv.

^{504} Ibid., xiv-xv.

^{505} Ibid., xiii.
unreal, possible and impossible, collapses.”⁵⁰⁶ Letting go of these representational fictions means letting go of those ‘false truths’ associated with global market capitalism that bar our access to real political truth. Put another way, gaining access to true political collectivity means somewhat paradoxically that we must first let go not only of fraternity, but of all constraints and/or bonds – historical, traditional, national, racial, ethnic, religious, etc. – that would prevent us from participating in a ‘singular’ politics, which for Badiou, is what true politics is.⁵⁰⁷

Given Badiou’s insistence upon collective equality as constitutive of the political subject, it follows that this subjectivity must be non-exclusionary. The political subject is ‘political’ precisely because of its fidelity to a universalizable truth in a universalizable (yet singular) political situation. Ideally, then, the collective subject of politics is the whole of humankind, provided that each has the capacity to declare and maintain fidelity to the truth in question. In Saint Paul, Badiou offers his most direct and explicit condemnation of identity politics. I would like to offer a rather lengthy quotation here, as this passage captures not only the condemnation in question, but also clearly lays out the ways in which he sees capital, identity and democracy being inextricably bound up with the logic of general equivalence:

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., xiii.
⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., xiv.
[...] each identification creates a figure that provides a material for its investment by the market. There is [...] nothing more amenable to the invention of new figures of monetary homogeneity, than a community and its territory of territories. The semblance of a non-equivalence is required so that equivalence itself can constitute a process. What inexhaustible potential for mercantile investments in this upsurge – taking the form of communities demanding recognition and so-called cultural singularities – of women, homosexuals, the disabled, Arabs! And these infinite combinations of predicative traits, what a god-send! Black homosexuals, disabled Serbs, Catholic pedophiles, moderate Muslims, [...]! Each time, a social image authorizes new products, special magazines, improved shopping malls, “free” radio stations, targeted advertising networks, and finally, heady “public debates” at peak viewing times. Deleuze put it perfectly: capitalist deterritorialization requires constant reterritorialization. Capital demands a permanent creation of subjective and territorial identities in order for its principle of movement to homogenize its space of action: identities, moreover, that never demand anything but the right to be exposed in the same way as others to the uniform prerogatives of the market. The capitalist logic of general equivalence and the identitarian and cultural logic of communities or minorities form an articulated whole. This articulation [...] is organically without truth.508

There are a few issues that Badiou identifies here that, although we have already discussed them, bear repeating. First, Badiou makes the point that it is the appearance of difference that is necessary for the establishment of those processes that serve the purposes of global market capitalism and the brand of democracy with which it is associated. The processes to which Badiou refers here are, I believe, sexuality, culture, technology and management. These processes are not concerned with resolving any actually existing inequality; they rely instead on the appearance of inequality as it becomes manifest in certain social images.

508 Badiou, Saint Paul, 11.
Second, these processes fuel the formation of identity-based communities, which in turn generate the demand for a notion of general equivalence under which marginalized social identities would be seen as equal to dominant social identities. This demand, as we have seen, also operates at the level of appearance, as evidenced by the ‘politicized’ forms in which right, freedom and equality are presented to us in democracy as it exists today.\footnote{By ‘politicized’ forms, I mean to indicate those examples of what we are offered in modern democracies (liberty, equivalence under the law) in place of the ‘philosophical’ forms (freedom, equality) in their ontological dimensions, for example.}

Third, we have discussed the ways in which our social identities are appropriated, repackaged and handed back to us in juridico-political form, but have not focused as intensively on the economic side of things as Badiou does here. The point that I think is worth further consideration here is in the final remarks of this passage regarding the movement of deterritorialization and reterritorialization that is vital to the function of capital. Specifically, what I see here is not necessarily limited to a discussion of the operation of capital.

Democracy also demands the “permanent creation of subjective and territorial identities in order for its principle of movement to homogenize its space of action.”\footnote{Badiou, \textit{Saint Paul}, 11.} What I mean to highlight by drawing this connection is the extent to which modern democracies have come to rely on social movements for their legitimacy. In this case, of course, the ‘movement’ does not refer to the flow of capital, but it does depend upon the constant circulation (and recirculation) of social images, which in turn are assimilated into individual and group identities. As these identities are gradually institutionalized or otherwise assimilated into existing socio-political hierarchies, we see the continued homogenization of the ‘space of action’ associated with democracy. These groups, moreover, “never demand anything but the right to be exposed in the same way as others to the uniform prerogatives of
the [existing juridico-political order].”\(^{511}\) This particular demand for recognition is not a demand for ‘something better’; it is the demand to be recognized as part of the status quo, the demand for general equivalence. Finally, I will transcribe Badiou’s final statements in this passage onto my broader analysis: the democratic logic of general equivalence combined with the identity-centered logic of community form an articulated whole. In Badiou’s thinking, this whole is not political because it is not founded in truth; for Rancière, it is not political because it is not based on the presupposition of equality; for Nancy, this whole represents the retreat of the political, insofar as it exposes a retreat of politics into law, where the law becomes a cipher for our understandings of community, equality and politics; and finally, for Derrida, this logic stands in as the model for the autoimmune relation between equality, freedom and democracy.

Among the many forms of government by which we have sought to rule one another, the most familiar are grounded in birth, wealth, force and/or science, but not, strictly speaking, in politics.\(^{512}\) Politics denotes something ‘extra,’ a supplementary criterion that is held in common by both the rulers and the ruled alike: since modern governments for the most part no longer place God or divine Law in this role, it is democracy, according to Rancière, “as a supplementary, or grounding, power that at once legitimizes and delegitimizes every set of institutions or the power of any one set of people.”\(^{513}\) In Thesis 5 of his “Ten Theses on Politics,” Rancière focused his discussion upon the subject of democracy: the people. In his view, ‘the people’ does not designate a group that identifies itself as the democratic community, nor does it refer to ‘the masses’ or ‘the workers’ in a communist connotation. Instead, Rancière understands ‘the people’ in terms of the supplement: “it [the

\(^{511}\) Ibid., 11.
\(^{512}\) Rancière, *Dissensus*, 52.
\(^{513}\) Ibid., 52.
people] is the supplementary part in relation to every count of the parts of the population, making it impossible to identify ‘the count of the uncounted’ with the whole of the community.”

‘The people’ cannot come to recognize itself through any principle of identity – race, religion, sex, class, etc. It does not identify with one particular part of the population, nor does it unite the various parts. The ‘whole’ or ‘all’ of the community that is named by democracy (‘the people’) represents what Rancière calls a constitutive ‘nothing’ or void: an absence (in this case, of any legitimacy of power) that is responsible for the creation of the very political space in which democracy becomes possible.

Coming full circle, a group of people united under the bonds of fraternity cannot represent the ‘whole’ of the social body. Because fraternal communities are grounded upon a principle of identity, the fraternal subject is constituted apart from others or outside of democratic equivalence. The term ‘brotherhood’ has become almost synonymous with ‘secret society,’ which of course is founded on an overtly exclusionary principle. ‘The people,’ on the other hand, cannot come to recognize itself through any principle of identity – race, religion, sex, class, etc. By definition, it cannot identify with one particular part of the population, but neither can it unite the various parts. According to Rancière, for example, the ‘whole’ or ‘all’ of the democratic community that is named by ‘the people’ represents a constitutive ‘nothing’ or void: an absence (in this case, of any legitimacy of power) that is responsible for the creation of the very political space in which democracy becomes possible. Where ‘the people’ comes to stand in for a void, fraternity can be seen as excess: it represents, as Jules Michelet famously described it, “the law above the law,” which, despite

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514 Ibid., 33.
515 Ibid., 34.
516 Ibid., 34.
its place in the revolutionary slogan, is fundamentally incompatible with the idea of rule by the people that underpins democracy.\textsuperscript{517}

Perhaps, then, there is a deeper connection between ‘Fraternité’ and ‘ou la Mort!’ than their mere proximity in the slogan. The idea that fraternity represents ‘the law above the law’ certainly points to such a link, since the same could unquestionably be said about death. The attachment of ‘liberty, equality, fraternity’ to ‘ou la mort’ not only overtly connected these concepts to the violence of the Revolution, it also delivered a very clear message about what was at stake in the minds of the Revolutionaries. On one hand, it signified a willingness to die for the cause on behalf of the Revolutionaries, and on the other, it constituted a threat to those who would stand in the way. Perhaps most importantly, however, it could be said to have instilled a sense of inevitability into the rest of the slogan, and thus to the Revolution itself. If we can agree that slogan was itself a kind of hypotyposis, ‘ou la Mort!’ is undeniably what caused it to achieve that status, giving it the appearance of givenness by laying claim to an apparently objective or universal existence in excess of human cognition. Beyond the fighting over whether or not freedom, equality and fraternity ought to become the defining virtues of a new Republic loomed the only universal certainty, the one fact that was undeniable no matter which side of the fighting one found themselves on.

\textit{(ii) …ou la Mort!}

The revolutionary slogan as a whole – \textit{Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité, ou la Mort!} – was adopted in order to produce, sustain and ultimately normalize a socio-political order that was founded upon those new forms of sociality which it called forth: liberty, equality, fraternity

\textsuperscript{517} Ozouf, “Fraternity,” 700. This of course is not only a Biblical reference, but also a reference to blood. As a side note, there is also an interesting connection (though obviously not one Michelet himself would have made) between fraternity as excess and Lacan’s Law of the Father and its role in the phallic order.
– namely, democratic forms of sociality.\textsuperscript{518} Turning back to Kant, we can see that this slogan was not only a practical statement about the goals and values of the revolutionaries, but it also represented both the aesthetic and the teleological dimensions of the Revolution itself. Aesthetically speaking, the slogan of the revolution was created as a response to the need to represent that which stood beyond all knowledge: a new political order grounded in liberty, equality and fraternity, where people were no longer treated as means to an end (i.e., the glory of the King), but were instead treated as ends in themselves (i.e., ‘the people’). Through this slogan, revolutionaries quite literally wrested their ‘ends’ from the hands of the aristocracy, using this slogan to illustrate that they had taken hold not only of the manner in which they would live, but also in which they would die, if necessary. 

\textit{Ou la mort} was a crucial part of this slogan up until the slogan was done away with during the German occupation of France during WWII, and it was left off when the motto was officially made the national motto of France after the War.\textsuperscript{519} Although the French people’s commitment to the ideals of ‘liberté, égalité, fraternité,’ was undoubtedly redoubled by the experience of WWII, the thought of more death more than likely would have become intolerable. \textit{Ou la mort} was, at face value, a statement about the eighteenth-century revolutionaries’ commitment to realizing the values that preceded it in the slogan, an indication that they would rather die than live any other way and that they would willingly sacrifice themselves in the name of the revolution itself. It is not surprising, then, that it was ultimately left off once the relative peace and security of the new political order had been established. With France no longer in a state of emergency, \textit{ou la mort} was relegated back to

\textsuperscript{518} It is important to note here that this was only one slogan among many, though arguably the most widely used. I focus on this slogan because of its widespread use, popularity, and its ultimate adoption by France as its national motto (significantly, without ‘ou la mort’).

\textsuperscript{519} During this period with France divided, the Vichy government (under obvious German influence) changed the slogan to \textit{travail, famille, patrie}, which translates to ‘work, family, fatherland.’
the realm of the unthinkable. More than this, however, *ou la mort* alludes to the fact that the totality of a true ‘kingdom of ends’ stubbornly *resists* representation in spite of any realization of those preceding ideals. On one hand, this resistance refers to the impossibility of representing something that has not yet been presented, referring to our inability to step ‘outside’ of time as a linear progression. This serves at least two functions. First, it allows revolutionaries to commit their lives to the realization of a socio-political future which does not yet exist, and about which they ultimately know nothing, precisely because it is uncertain. Second, death stands in for this lack of knowledge as a placeholder, indicating that even death must certainly be better than the current arrangement. On the other hand, the impossibility of representing the totality that is implied by death leaves open the possibility of resisting that totality, leaving room for singularities and differences, which have become the building blocks of contemporary political thought.

For these reasons, I posit *ou la mort* (alongside ‘the people’) as one of the contingent foundations of a politics of supplementarity and presenting it as yet another way of appearing (otherwise than as ‘the King’s subjects’ or as ‘free and equal brothers’). Where ‘the people’ represents the constitutive void, *ou la mort* represents a surplus. This small phrase also encapsulates the limits of such a politics: it ‘captures’ that which cannot be captured by any politics, namely its ‘end,’ and its ends, its limits, its ‘outside,’ its ‘ou…’, its alternatives, its futures, its ‘other’ possibilities. As part of the slogan as a whole, it was clear to what *ou la mort* was the alternative. In fact, one could make the case death became inevitable or necessary in order to achieve freedom and equality. The strong sense of fraternity that was sought by the revolutionaries was arguably created and nurtured by both the constant threat of death and the symbolic commitment to die for the cause. Indeed, *ou la mort* functioned to

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520 Kant’s ‘Kingdom of Ends’ refers to his second version of the categorical imperative, whereby each individual ought to treat others as ends in themselves rather than as means to achieve one’s own ends.
strengthen the commitment to the words that preceded it. It is useful to think about Laclau here in that ‘ou la mort’ functions as an ‘empty signifier’ insofar as it symbolically structures the political environment and articulates a universal idea of justice in much the same way as ‘the people’ does.\(^{521}\) When detached from the slogan, the direct threat of *ou la mort* is neutralized; *ou la mort*, not preceded by anything, loses its political authority.\(^{522}\) The drive to revolution with which it was associated subsides, and in its place ‘the people’ begins to take shape. Detached from the preceding half of the phrase, *ou la mort* retains only a weak symbolic value within the post-revolutionary political landscape. Without the threat/promise of death to bind people together, another relation emerges to take its place.

According to Derrida, democracy forces us to think of ‘being together’ in terms of responsibility; more specifically, he describes it as a responsibility that we can never fulfill. Derrida conceptualizes *democracy-to-come* – that is, a democracy that must always remain ‘to come’ – in order to create a concept of democracy that no longer belongs to ‘politics,’ thus moving away from thinking democracy solely in terms of liberal democracy as a form of government. The democracy-to-come belongs instead to each of us, its citizens, who through it become members of a *spectral* community.\(^{523}\) These citizens are not united under contract, system or constitution, but rather under this ‘specter’ of democracy. I would add that this specter is of the order of the aesthetic insofar as it can deliver to us a sense of what will be permissible to say or show within that particular social order. Liberty, equality and fraternity (taken both individually and together as a phrase) are forms of relation or ways of being-toward-another that imply responsibility, likeness, familiarity, ‘one more than I,’ etc. They signify a set of ideals that are bound together within the notion of ‘the people’ through

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\(^{522}\) Nevertheless, even a detached and floating *‘ou la Mort!’* is unsettling!

democracy, and like Derrida’s understanding of democracy, seem destined to remain on the horizon, just out of reach. Death, on the other hand, always arrives. It anchors this promise to the less distant and unforseeable future, giving it instead the appearance of immediacy.

The phrase ‘liberté, égalité, fraternité’ has acted as a container and refuge for French identity for more than two hundred years. At its inception, it captured the ideals of a democracy-to-come, a call to unification in the dawn of a new political era in France. In the present, it has come to represent the longing for a way to capture a sense of unity in the face of rampant abuses of power, widespread inequality and ever-increasing socio-political division. In other words, it announces a democracy-still-to-come. While some claim to be mourning the sense of ‘freedom, equality and fraternity’ that they believe was once present but is now lost, others claim that it has only ever existed as a promise, never having arrived in the first place. Despite its conspicuous absence from France’s modern motto, death will continue to arrive. Although this omission is an attempt to distance the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity from the violence of the Reign of Terror, death still has an important role to play. It provides us a relation to the impossible in its power to present ‘nothing.’ It is a mode of ‘being-toward-an-other’ which gathers us together in the void, where ‘being together’ also implies a fundamental unfamiliarity, declassification, or disidentification. The ‘part with no part,’ the ‘outsider,’ the dispossessed, the excluded, the ‘inexistent’ – this figure comes to stand in for what the death drive represents in the order of the social: it allows the social to appear as a coherent totality, with only proper parts, totalizing and whole, while paradoxically also holding open the possibility that this is not the case, not the ‘end’ of politics. This figure stands in for the impossible insofar as it allows for the fulfillment of society’s fantasy of totality or completeness while simultaneously ensuring that that never actually happens.
This relation can be thought as the ‘democratic sublime,’ wherein a belief in the superiority of reason over nature is replaced by a belief in the superiority of appearance over being.

Perhaps the question then becomes, is the connection between death and politics indissoluble? My tentative answer is yes; but this ‘yes’ is premised upon an interpretation of the function of death as a constitutive void: the exception to or negation of life that nevertheless makes life ‘liveable.’ I am of course thinking here of something similar to the way in which Esposito presents the relation between immunity and community. If we can think of “liberté, égalité, fraternité” as comprising the political identity of the individual within the democratic community, then perhaps ‘ou la mort!’ would be the very contagion to which we try to gain immunity through “liberté, égalité, fraternité.” Such an attempt to immunize the individual from ‘ou la mort!’ which simply represents an ‘impossible’ alternative to democracy, puts the very notion of alternatives at risk.

Through this investigation of political communities, we are also, by way of relation, asked to think of the subject of politics in an entirely new way: no longer in terms of the individual, a priori subject but instead as a collective entity which is created in and sustained by a particular truth. Moreover, we have been asked to radically reorient our understanding of collectivity, in the sense that what is formed is not a ‘whole’ but rather a collection of incommensurable singularities who are nevertheless bound together (however temporarily) in equality by their fidelity to a truth. Though it is called by many names, this has led to a radical rethinking of how we understand democracy: whether we think it in terms of a ‘democracy to come’ or a new form of communism such as Nancy’s ‘communism of non-equivalence,’ what is clear is that each of these thinkers is engaged in a search for democracy’s ‘truth’ because of a deep-seated dissatisfaction with the state of our
understanding of democracy today. In a relatively new little book entitled *After Fukushima*, Nancy captures the spirit of this demand for a new understanding of democracy by describing it in the following way: it is “democracy […] thought of starting only from the equality of incommensurables: absolute and irreducible singulars that are not individuals or social groups but sudden appearances, arrivals, and departures, voices, tones – here and now, every instant.”

Whatever the philosophical differences that separate the political thought of Rancière, Nancy, Derrida and Badiou, this sentiment is precisely why I have chosen to bring them together in this project, and why I strongly believe that, in the face of a proliferation of ‘post-subjective,’ ‘post-revolutionary,’ and ‘post-democratic’ theoretical movements, this conversation about identity, subjectivity, collectivity and supplementarity is and will remain relevant and necessary.

This is precisely where the final chapter of this project picks up. Coming out of this lengthy discussion of community, the affirmation of something like Nancy’s ‘being-with’ not only compliments, but according to Philip Armstrong, also supplements certain terms that we usually associate with the work of Derrida: alterity, hospitality, friendship, and the monolingualism of the other. This act of supplementation reopens those terms, “not just to questions of alliance, solidarity, and allegiance,” but also “to their ontological presuppositions.” If ‘being-with’ is read as supplement to these terms, he argues, then it “works to displace the sense of alterity they also tend to presuppose, so that the ontologically fundamental question remains, as Nancy insists, how ‘the other turns out to be (s’avère) the other of the with.’”

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525 Armstrong, “In Fraternity’s Wake,” 71.
526 Ibid., 71-72.
here as to the depth of possibility that is opened up to us by reading the thinkers I have grouped here – primarily Nancy, Derrida, Badiou and Rancière – together as a community, despite what we can perhaps optimistically call their distinct methodologies. Specifically, when we dig into the ontological implications of this ‘pact’ – the affirmation of a ‘fidelity to’ as a form of ‘being-with’ – we can see more clearly the ways in which these thinkers form a community in spite of (or because of?) the various immunities that distinguish their work. In the following chapter, perhaps fittingly, this community is formed in the shared theme of exception, rejection, and exclusion in their work on the conditions of possibility for political subjectivity.
Chapter 5: The Aesthetics of Subtraction – Subject, Supplement, Ekstasis

While it would seem correct to argue that certain subject-positions have lost their necessary centrality to democratic or leftist politics (e.g., a self-present, individual subject), this does not mean that the notion of the subject has lost its importance altogether in contemporary political thought, especially in light of the struggle for equality (democracy, recognition). By focusing instead on an understanding of the subject as ‘decentered,’ ‘contingent,’ and/or ‘multiple,’ etc., it has become possible to sidestep identity politics by acknowledging a radical plurality in these sites of struggle (rather than re-inscribing a hierarchy) through something like the presupposition of, and fidelity to, equality. It remains necessary, therefore, that a subject-agent enact this shift, and all signs in contemporary theory seem to point to a preference for a collective or multiple subject. The ‘other’ subject of democracy, ‘the people’ (as opposed to the self-interested individual), might seem to be a good candidate here, but is unclear if that subject position is adequate to this task. Specifically, its formation within and after the establishment of democracy is problematic,
specifically in terms of fostering the level of solidarity that would be required to achieve large-scale goals.

The ‘all’ of the people is, for Rancière, a constitutive void that separates it from the ‘whole’ of the social body. Rancière argues that this original separation establishes politics as “the action of supplementary subjects, inscribed as a surplus in relation to every count of the parts of society.” The core of the question of politics,” he concludes, “resides in the interpretation of this void and surplus.” In this chapter, taking my cue from Rancière’s discussion of ‘the people,’ I engage some of the interpretations of ‘void,’ ‘supplementarity’ and ‘surplus’ that are interwoven throughout our thinkers’ understandings of political subjectivity, intersubjective relations, and the ‘place’ of the subject. Very broadly, this discussion takes as its starting point the problematic division between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ as two such possible places, echoing my previous discussions of parts and wholes, the split between politics and the political, and the relations between aesthetics and politics. I argue that blurring the lines between seemingly opposing concepts or spheres of intelligibility constitutes an act of resistance against the fundamentalist or totalizing tendencies of identification. Specifically, I am speaking to the enduring sense that we do not know where to ‘put’ the subject, since its ‘place’ is not clearly identifiable. The subject of this politics is therefore an ek-static subject, one who is (in some cases quite literally) ‘out of place,’ uncounted in the ‘all’ of the people, and yet arguably assumes the role of a constitutive transgression.

Our question cannot be ‘where is the subject?’ because this amounts not only to a demand to pin the subject down to its ‘proper place’ but also to a narrow and fixed definition.

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528 Ibid., 33.
529 Ibid., 34.
530 From the greek ekstasis: standing outside oneself.
of the subject, which would thus negate all of the work I have done thus far in this project to refute that way of thinking. If we ask instead, ‘what are the subject’s possible orientations?’ we leave sufficient room for the movement of alternative understandings and (dis)locations. Since I cannot explore all such possibilities here, my focus falls primarily upon the post-foundational notion of a collective subject who, because of its inherent plurality and supplementarity, has an orientation toward ‘exteriority,’ which itself represents both void and surplus. Using Rancière’s notion of the people as ‘supplementary subject’ as a starting point, I use this final chapter to trace the contours of what we could call a politics of ‘inclusive exclusion’ - or more simply, a politics of supplementarity – whose subject is never immediately locatable due to its condition as peripheral, spectral, inexistent, dispossessed, or rejected. This subject interjects – it appears unexpectedly to interrupt the apparent harmony of a given system, withdrawing just as unexpectedly to appear anew in a new context. This idea continues to build upon my assertion in the preceding chapter that disidentification is itself a politics whose subject exists in a state of perpetual becoming. The politics of supplementarity is therefore not about the fact of one’s visibility, but about becoming visible (appearing) in unexpected ways, in unexpected places, at unexpected times, or not at all, as ways in which the subject can assert its sovereignty.

In the first section, I explore the tension between interiority and exteriority in light of the impossibility of locating a pure ‘outside’ (and thus of situating any being there) by offering an aesthetic reading of exteriority. I approach this problem through post-foundational, deconstructive, and ontological interventions in politics, working toward what Rancière refers to as a ‘restaging [of] the status of appearance.’\(^{531}\) I see this restaging as a function of the post-foundational understanding of the relation between grounding and

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groundlessness, and thus about the impossibility of anything like ‘absolute totality’ or ‘final ground.’ I begin this discussion with Derrida’s reading of Kant in *The Truth in Painting*. Here, I focus on his reading of ‘the frame’ and its role not as a border separating what is inside and outside the work, but rather as itself constitutive of the relation between inside and outside, neither ‘part’ of the work itself nor strictly ‘outside’ it.\(^{532}\) The frame serves to demonstrate that there can be no strict division between inside and outside because the frame itself is constitutive of that binary. I trace a similar move in Nancy’s deconstruction of the opposition between immanence and transcendence, which has lead him to introduce a third term, ‘transimmanence,’ which is understood as ‘open immanence’ that exposes the world as lacking any true exteriority. Continuing this theme, I touch again upon Rancière’s notion of ‘heterotopic spaces’ as representing a determinate place for the intedeterminate.

In the second section, I begin by tracing the aesthetic contours of this exclusionary politics by examining the space-times of exteriority. I re-introduce the ‘inoperative teleology’ that I believe must accompany the emergence of politics (in Rancière’s definition), the subject who is figured as ‘becoming,’ and the creation of these unlocatable, unmarked (heterotopic) political spaces. I explore the connection between this inoperative teleology and what we might frame as the space-time of otherness. Next, in transitioning to the notion of the void as a constitutive (non-)space, I sketch the relation between exclusion and void through a reading of Badiou’s notions of ‘inconsistent multiplicity’ and ‘inexistence.’ Like Rancière’s ‘part with no part,’ the inexistent is not part of the count of the whole of the community; it (in)exists in excess of that count as surplus. Beyond Badiou’s specific example of Quebec’s legislation on suffrage between 1918 and 1950 regarding the exclusion of its Inuit, Metis and First Nations populations, I discuss the role that a figure such as the

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inexistent has to play in politics more broadly. For example, where identity politics would work to overcome the ‘inexistence’ of a particular identity and grant it maximal appearance based on that particularity, post-foundational politics works to overcome the transcendental function of assigning inexistence itself. Inexistence is not innate, and thus appearance is always contingent. The condition of being excluded, though it has many material juridico-political foundations and effects, is also an aesthetic condition insofar as it is largely concerned with presentation. Although there are many ways in which resistance to political exclusion is staged, my focus in this section is upon the notion of using the contingency of appearance as one such strategy of resistance.

This latter half of this section deals with space, asking not only who occupies the ‘outside,’ but also investigating the manner in which it is occupied. Specifically, I look here at the politicization of exclusion through the positions of dispossession, statelessness, precariousness and vulnerability, and I explore the notion that the condition of exteriority potentially offers us a radical position (space-time) through which we can continue to rethink political agency, and has the potential to become a site of political subjectivation. For example, Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou argue that dispossession must be understood not only in terms of a deprivation, but also as a position through which one can demand recognition, performatively opposing one’s own dispossession by occupying this ‘outside’ against hierarchy and forcing an encounter with alterity.\footnote{Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, \textit{Dispossession: The Performative in the Political} (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 1-2.} In this reading, we come to see a performative dispossession of the primacy of the sovereign, individual subject through a focus upon the crowd as an alternative subject position that depends upon its very collectivity. This notion of a collective political subject links this line of thinking back to the understandings of political subjectivity that we have already touched upon through Rancière,
Nancy and Badiou. I go on to discuss the condition of ‘statelessness’ as an effect of political re-framing, a state of ‘inexistence’ against which citizenship is reinforced. From here, I turn to Butler’s recent work on ‘precariousness,’ where she explores the notion of precariousness as a social condition rather than an individual or exceptional circumstance. Alongside (but not exactly in line with) Esposito’s theory of immunity, she advocates a politics that stems from this vulnerability: a universally shared condition of precariousness and inevitable interdependency upon which we can make political demands and build principles.

In the third and final section of this chapter, I offer a few possible answers to the question that Nancy posed nearly 30 years ago and with which we as a theoretical community are still grappling: who comes after the subject? Although there is a growing faction of post-humanist thinkers who believe that we ought to do away with the subject altogether, I place myself firmly in the camp that believes that there is indeed still a ‘who’ after the deconstruction of the subject. Unlike its predecessor, however, the trace of the ‘who’ that remains in its wake does not demand an answer; it is a ‘who’ that remains suspended in its indeterminate form, in a state of sustained anticipation and/or ambiguity.

Drawing upon the work I have done in the preceding chapters of this project and responding to the conception of a ‘post-subjective’ era, I offer the notion of the ‘para-subject’ or ‘interject’ as an alternative to the outright elimination of the subject. I cast these notions into (and out of) a reading of the political subject as it emerges in the work of Rancière and Badiou as an ‘unwitting anarchist,’ a political clinamen who takes part where it has no part, who is always extended beyond itself, unlocatable and unpredictable, who resists domination through acts or practices of declassification. This particular ‘who,’ like the word itself,

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remains ambiguous as to its number, its identifying features, and its social status: it is, at least potentially, anyone and everyone.

(i) the aesthetics of exteriority

In his essay entitled “Contemporary Art and the Politics of Aesthetics,” Rancière points out that the term ‘aesthetics’ refers to both a historically specific mode of identification of art and the forms of visibility and speech that make politics possible. For Rancière, therefore, aesthetics plays a key role in the historical configuration of both social and perceptual experience, and is largely responsible for the connection between the two. Aesthetics does not simply mimic or influence political systems of power; it reconfigures them in ways that reveal different divisions of social roles and forms of subjectivation. Returning for a moment to his reading of Kant, the reason that Rancière finds the aesthetic dimension so rife with possibility for political intervention is that it rejects the hierarchical set of relations that are produced through the cooperation of the faculties (sensibility, understanding and reason). This rejection creates a dissensus between ‘sense and sense’ – that is, between the object that presents itself as ‘itself’ (as given) and the ‘sense’ or meaning that we attribute to it in its signification. Rancière describes this dissensus as “a distance with respect to the reality/appearance [of] opposition itself, a way of restaging the very status of appearance or the very relation of the visible and the invisible.” This disruption in the relation between ‘sense and sense’ is therefore not a dissensus between ‘appearance’ and ‘reality’ as such, but rather between the (dis)appearance of opposition and the reality of the relation. What disappears here is the connection between the appearance of an object as

‘whole,’ present and given, and the forces ‘external’ to it which are responsible for its appearance as whole. In other words, what disappears is the fundamental relation between two appearances – ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ – or between the work and the frame that is ultimately responsible for constituting each as such.537

Leveling the difference between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ is, quite literally, a matter of perspective. In suggesting that it is an aesthetic/teleological exteriority that seems to be at stake in politics, I will briefly elaborate upon the two senses of ‘sense’ as they are articulated within the context of aesthetic experience.538 On one hand, sense refers to the physical experience of the world via sensation (or sensuous apprehension). This experience is subjective, particular and disinterested, where the object of sensuous apprehension presents itself as given. On the other hand, sense refers to the elaboration of this first experience, our ascription of meaning to that experience through the ways in which we link it with other such experiences. Thus we make a judgment about the experience in order to render its ‘sense’ universally communicable – this is the creation of meaning, and meaning is only ‘meaningful’ when it is shared. Put another way, sense is both an individual perceptual experience and a social one. Sense informs our understanding of the world; the transcendental function of ‘making sense’ is responsible for the creation of the inside/outside dichotomy and thus also for the assignation of existence/inexistence. Thus there is no ‘true’ outside, but rather we create the senses of being outside, for example, of having been stripped of the ‘ends’ toward which we live politically (freedom, equality, community). This is, in a

537 Taking this idea even further, of course, is Deleuze, who argues that there is no hierarchy of appearances at all, that all appearances are simulated equally. In Kantian terms, then, one might be able to say that Deleuze has no use for representation or hypotyposis (for each implies an original and an appearance), but rather that all presentations must be taken individually at face value. Please see especially Gilles Deleuze, “Plato and the Simulacrum,” trans. Rosalind Krauss, October 27 (Winter, 1983): 45-56; and more generally Difference and Repetition, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

538 Among the thinkers of aesthetics who have subscribed to this notion are Kant, Rancière and Nancy, who generally agree – on the surface – on the basic elements of each understanding of ‘sense,’ though diverge in terms of what the relation between these two senses entails.
sense, a political death whereby one comes to inexist politically, becoming the specter that threatens to alter the appearance of those who rely on its inexistence. But is the excluded element truly separate from the sphere of inclusion, or is it indeed an integral part of that inclusion as Badiou would have it? What if this notion of existence-as-appearance is merely a frame for the presentation of the political importance of appearance itself?

In order to address these questions, I now turn to Derrida’s discussion of the \textit{parergon}, Nancy’s conception of \textit{transimmanence} and Rancière’s notion of \textit{heterotopia} as exemplars of what kinds of thinking are necessary in order to expose the contingent status of certain divisions such as inside/outside and self/other. Moreover, I use these discussions, in addition to Badiou’s arguments about the function of the inexistent, in order to support the assertion that this ‘outside’ is in fact \textit{not} a politically vacuous position, but rather acts as a supplement (coming to serve as an aid to) and/or trace (an always already hidden contradiction within) within the broader situation. The outsider, like the outside, is ‘undecidable,’ meaning that its designation as ‘outside’ made in contrast to that which is allegedly ‘inside’ is always already problematic.\textsuperscript{539} The most striking aspect of Derrida’s account of the supplement is this ‘undecidability,’ which indicates that a supplement can always be interpreted in two ways. Returning to the language that we began using at the start of this chapter, what remains necessarily undecidable is whether the supplement acts as a \textit{surplus}, “a plentitude enriching another plentitude, the fullest measure of presence,” or whether it comes to fill a \textit{void}, an attempt to stand in place for something that is missing or lost, “its place […] assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness.”\textsuperscript{540} Eventually,

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\textsuperscript{539} Note: this understanding of ‘undecidability’ is taken from Derrida’s earlier work, where he uses it as a tool to deconstruct certain dualisms. In his later work on aporias (on hospitality, forgiveness, mourning, the gift, etc.) ‘undecidability’ also comes to refer to a particular relation between possibility and impossibility, where the very thing that makes something possible also renders it impossible.

\end{footnotesize}
Derrida proposes that supplementarity refers both to presence and absence, addition and substitution, surplus and void.\textsuperscript{541}

\textbf{the frame}

Certain differences between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ are fundamental to our traditional understanding of politics. A significant portion of Derrida’s work over the years has been dedicated to demonstrating the groundlessness of this distinction in metaphysical thought. Although he acknowledges that there is a degree to which the distinction between inside and outside is necessary to thought in general, he locates the most profuse reliance upon this kind of thinking in our understandings of art and its ‘meaning’ and discusses this idea at length in \textit{The Truth in Painting}. In the second section of this text, entitled “The Parergon,” which is dedicated to his critique of Kant’s understanding of aesthetics, Derrida argues that the “permanent requirement” of making a distinction between the internal ‘proper sense’ of a work of art and its external context, “organizes all philosophical discourses on art, the meaning of art and meaning as such […]. This requirement presupposes a discourse on the limit between the inside and outside of the art object, here a \textit{discourse on the frame}.”\textsuperscript{542} What is required is that someone or something be \textit{constantly} engaged in actively distinguishing between the inside and the outside of the object, and he argues here that this is precisely the role that is performed by the frame. Although this function becomes most apparent in the case of a painting, it is by no means limited to paintings but applies universally to aesthetic objects. The function performed by the frame is not only that of maintaining the distinction between inside and outside, but also of sustaining the illusion that this distinction is ‘natural.’

\textsuperscript{541} Ibid., 200. The most widely-cited examples include masturbation, birth control, certain pharmaceutical products.
\textsuperscript{542} Ibid., 45.
Derrida draws our attention to Kant’s use of the Greek terms *ergon* and *parergon*. Kant distinguishes between *ergon*, which refers to the ‘work’ itself, and *parergon*, as that which is ‘outside the work.’\(^{543}\) Derrida notes here that in French, ‘outside the work’ is expressed as *hors d’oeuvre*, which can also be translated as ‘‘accessory, foreign, or secondary object,’ ‘supplement,’ ‘aside,’ ‘remainder.’’\(^{544}\) By definition then, it is what should not distinguish itself or become the “principal subject”: “a *parergon* is against, beside, and above and beyond the *ergon*, the work accomplished, the accomplishment of the work. But it is not incidental; it is connected to and cooperates in its operation from the outside.”\(^{545}\) The essential distinctiveness of the work and its status as primary is dependent upon the supplementarity of the *parergon*. The reason that both Kant and Derrida find the frame so interesting is that, in the case of a painting for example, the frame is clearly not part of the work, but it is not entirely outside it either. The frame as *parergon* is therefore somehow essential to the work, yet it is neither part of the work nor entirely external to it. Kant himself had identified the curious status of the frame, and responded by identifying it as a special kind of *parergon*, which Derrida describes as “a hybrid of outside and inside, but a hybrid which is not a mixture or a half-measure, a hybrid which is called to the inside of the inside in order to constitute it as an inside.”\(^{546}\) Though Kant himself did not see it this way, the significance that Derrida finds here is that the inside of the work, that which constitutes it as the work and distinguishes it from that which it is not (the outside, other works), is given to it by the frame. Thus the work comes to be seen as an ‘incomplete totality’ rather than complete in itself. For Derrida, then, it is the work performed by the frame itself that generates the separation between inside and outside, between *ergon* and *parergon*, whereby

\(^{543}\) Ibid., 54.
\(^{544}\) Ibid., 54.
\(^{545}\) Ibid., 54.
\(^{546}\) Ibid., 63. My emphasis.
the *ergon* would not exist as such without the frame. The *ergon* is therefore an effect of the *parergon*. In a sense, the authenticity and originality of the work – its claims to ‘truth’ as a work of art – are determined and verified by the frame.

There are some very interesting effects of this mode of thinking, this ‘parergonality,’ as Derrida calls it, which is a facet of the more familiar ‘undecidability.’ In keeping with this discussion of aesthetics for the moment, judgments about works of art become problematic in this line of thinking because traditionally, these judgments are solely focused upon the work itself. It therefore becomes extremely important to try to distinguish between what is framed (the ‘intrinsic’) and what is excluded as frame and as outside the frame (all that is ‘extrinsic’ to the work). This leads him to conclude that there can be no theory of the work in-itself (of the art object as such); our theories must instead regard the entire context within which that object has been produced and judged. The frame acts as the limit for both the inside and the outside simultaneously, existing in-between, separate from yet integral to each. It is also important to note that what constitutes the ‘outside’ of the work is not just the “wall on which the painting is hung,” the gallery in which it hangs, or the other works with which it is juxtaposed; it also includes “the whole field of historical, economic, political inscription in which the drive to signature is produced.” This ‘drive to signature,’ the artist’s drive to authenticate the work, is a drive that originates ‘outside’ of the work itself as part of the economic, historical and political inscription of the concepts of originality and the individual, presence, ownership and authorship. We can now see how Derrida’s deconstruction of the notion of self-constitution that is traditionally associated with the *ergon* fits into his larger project of the deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence.

547 Ibid., 63.
548 Ibid., 61.
The potency of Derrida’s argument about parergonality and its effect on the discourse of aesthetics can be extended to other discourses as well. Building upon this foundation, we can begin to explore some of the ways in which the separation between inside and outside is intimately related to the separation between self and other, and the ways in which this separation is essential to the construction of identity. Put in slightly different terms, the deconstruction of the notion that a work is self-constituted can be understood to take place within the larger project of the deconstruction of identity. As with all deconstruction, the goal is to decenter a concept rather than to get rid of it altogether, which would mean that it would no longer be permissible for that concept to be fixed or grounded in ‘presence.’ Working with the example of identity as it is supposed to ‘belong’ to the subject, then, decentering it would mean taking it away from the subject – not in the sense of removing our identifications altogether, but rather showing that they do not belong to the subject prior to social engagement, for example. We will see a working example of this in the discussion of Badiou’s ‘inexistent’ regarding universal suffrage in Quebec.

The most useful aspects of Derrida’s deconstruction of self-constitution that relate to our discussion of identity and sociality are the connected notions of supplementarity and the ‘drive to signature.’ The work of supplementarity is both essential and threatening to the constitution of an object, be it social or otherwise. It is essential and threatening simultaneously because it shows us that without the supplement, there can be no identity – no ‘itself’ of the object in question. The very idea of the object ‘itself’ is constituted only through supplementarity, rendering the difference between its inside and its outside undecidable. Perhaps the most important aspect of the supplement is that it does not properly ‘belong’ to the object to which it is attached, yet the fact that it can be detached does not make it dispensable; in fact, it makes the supplement even more necessary to the work of
constituting an idea of the object as ‘whole’ or as ‘itself.’ Derrida calls this the supplement’s “quasi-detachment” from the object, a condition that serves to cover over the “lack” on the inside of the object which would otherwise reveal its incompleteness.\(^{549}\) If we apply this thinking to contemporary understandings of the social, one could say that identity acts as a social supplement. In performing the work of supplementarity, identity should not be regarded as interfering with the work of the social (for example, identity groups ‘disrupting’ the relative peace and stability of the established social order). Following Derrida’s line of thought, it could be argued that identity works to cover over the ‘lack’ that lies at the heart of the social, giving it the appearance of completeness and coherence, and even that the social performs this same operation upon the subject with respect to identity. Similarly, Rancière argues that the entire social field, constructed by/through the police order, performs this same operation on a larger scale: the ‘distribution of the social’ is a hierarchical arrangement that uses what is visible, sayable, and possible to cover over its own lack, that is, the invisible, unsayable, ‘impossible’ part with no part, which, if left unchecked, could reveal alternative divisions of social roles and forms of subjectivization that threaten the appearance of stability, coherence and ‘wholeness’ within the existing order.

**Transimmanence**

Nancy presents another way for us to understand this kind of relation between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ in his deconstruction of the opposition between immanence and transcendence. Immanence and transcendence understood separately are, according to Nancy, insufficient for understanding the multiple movements, qualities and relations of being-in-the-world. In their place, he offers his notion of *transimmanence*, which can be understood as

\(^{549}\) Ibid., 59.
a “multi-refracted, diverse, ever-moving kind of immanence.” Transimmanence is not about staging either a tension or balance between ‘the world’ and its ‘outside’ (between immanence and transcendence); it is “absolutely immanent,” insofar it is concerned with the tensions and relations among modes of being and existing in the world. Coming back to The Inoperative Community, Nancy’s understanding of community is laid out both in terms of a resistance to immanent power (both in its religious sense and in terms of ground) and in terms of a resistance to the obligation to produce (something ‘more’ as in fusion into a new body). In his own words, “the community that becomes a single thing (body, mind, fatherland, Leader…) necessarily loses the in of being-in-common. Or, it loses the with or the together that defines it. It yields being-together [trans-immanence] to a being of togetherness [transcendence].” Standing in stark opposition to this, Nancy posits what he calls the “truth of community,” which, he argues, is to be expressed in the retreat from this kind of being.

In the example of community, then, transimmanence can be understood as both the opening to and the condition of “being-the-one-with-the-other to which we are exposed.” The transimmanence of community is thus also intimately related to finitude, or as Nancy risks, “the infinite lack of infinite identity.” Keeping community open means resisting communion, or its consolidation “into a unique and ultimate identity that would no longer be exposed. Being in common means, to the contrary, no longer having, in any form, in any empirical or ideal place, such a substantial identity, and sharing this (narcissistic) ‘lack of identity.'”

551 Ibid., xxxix. Original emphasis.
552 Ibid., xxxix.
553 Ibid., xxxix.
554 Ibid., xxxviii.
555 Ibid. Original emphasis.
Right away, we need to be careful here to distinguish Nancy’s understanding of ‘absolute immanence’ from something like ‘pure’ or ‘radical’ immanence. Nancy acknowledges the existence of an ‘outside of the world,’ in the sense that there is something ‘more than’ the world from which it can potentially derive its sense. Importantly, however, Nancy locates this ‘outside’ in human experience. Our experiences of the world, through which the existence of ‘otherness’ has prompted us to posit a transcendent outside, are for Nancy actually an extension of the world itself, and do not appeal to any other world.\footnote{Jean-Luc Nancy, \textit{Noli Me Tangere}, trans. Sarah Clift et al. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 143.} Put another way, the idea that there is something more than this world, and/or that its meaning can only be derived from the outside, are part of this world. Transimmanence is never ‘closed off’ to its outside because it contains its outside; the ‘trans’ of transimmanence implies a kind of ‘crossing over’ of the outside into immanence, which is why it is also described as an ‘open-immanence.’ It is openness at the level of existence, where one is continually exposed in one’s singular plurality in a world that nevertheless lacks true exteriority. As Nancy himself puts it, “what ‘is not of this world’ is not elsewhere: it is the opening in the world, the separation, the parting and the raising.”\footnote{Ibid., 48.}

This ‘disclosure’ of the world’s immanence is precisely that which transcends immanence. Disclosure is not in opposition to immanence, but can be thought instead as its unworking. Returning to Nancy’s understanding of community, we can recall that he sees our task in thinking community as that of unworking the metaphysical horizon in which community is traditionally thought. Community cannot be thought as something that is created by or through identity because community is not structured by the possession of a common substance. We are already thrown into the world and into being-in-common prior to
our coming to possess an immanent identity. The plural aspect of our singular plurality ensures that one could never signify oneself totally, since anything like complete presence or fully realized consciousness would be impossible, except perhaps in death. Our singularity—the singular aspect of singular plurality—on the other hand, is what ensures that our being-in-common can never be ‘complete,’ escaping the totalitarian objective of the creation of a single, absolute community (or sense). We are able to avoid this totalizing force because it *unworks* its own claim to absoluteness and closure. Turning back to Derrida, to the operation of both autoimmunity and the frame, we can see that any such closure of community which is premised upon a transcendent value, identity or sense, can never close itself off completely, and is thus always already open to the ‘outside.’ In other words, it is precisely this sense, through which the community purports to enclose its members, that transcends its immanence.

In order to communicate—in order to *exist*—one must address oneself to another, to an ‘outside.’ In Nancy’s view, this is not a choice we make, but rather a fact of existence. We cannot exist without being exposed to others. Every singular communication or appearance entails a proliferation of voices and appearances. Communication is only made possible through the other, yet its reception by the other is never a certainty. This is the heart of the ontological experience of community for Nancy: a certain way of rethinking the relation between self and others through transimmanence, which is what has lead him to posit singular plurality as our ontological condition.

**Heterotopic space**

Though Nancy says that our ontological condition is one of singular plurality, we seem to be as yet unable to incorporate this into our social configurations, into policy, or into
any kind of sustained political experience. Given the deep interconnectedness between the political, ontological and aesthetic realms, I believe we can look once again to Rancière and to what he sees as lying at the heart of aesthetic experience to find a way to enact these singular/collective expressions. “Heterotopia,” he writes, refers to “a certain way of thinking the ‘heteron’ or the ‘other’: the other as the effect of a reconfiguration of the distribution of places, identities and capacities.”

He offers an example from Kant’s third Critique:

The conceptualization of the beautiful in Kant’s Analytic constructs a heterotopia, since it subtracts the form of the palace from the various ‘topoi’ within which it is located either as a functional architectural building or a place of power, an exhibition of aristocratic pride, an object of social or moral reprobation, etc. It does not add another topos to all the topoi that were defined by the ethical configuration. Instead, it creates a point where all those locations and the oppositions they define are neutralized. […] What is common to all those forms of aesthetic heterotopia is the determination of a place of the indeterminate…

What we are left with, in effect, is not the absence of topos (utopia, or ‘no place,’ for example), but rather the topos through which these arguments are staged. This topos is itself ‘neutral,’ not partial to any argument in particular, and remains open to ‘other’ arguments and other characterizations. To take another example, I will argue here that Rancière’s reconceptualization of democracy also constructs a heterotopia (which I believe was his intention), since it subtracts the form of democracy from the various topoi within which it is typically located, either as a form of government, a set of ideals and identifications embraced by a society or culture, a language of left and right, an object of social or moral esteem, etc.

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559 Ibid., 20-21.
The construction of this heterotopia does not add yet another topos to these, but rather creates a space in which all of these locations and oppositions are neutralized. In this neutralization, Rancière ‘determines a space for the indeterminate’; he determines a space within which the ‘part with no part’ can come to take part through the presupposition of their equality, a space for the collective presentation and articulation of singular responses to shared concerns.

What is created in this encounter is what Rancière calls a heterotopia, or a space in which to encounter the other, specifically through the presupposition of equality. Heterotopia is not a concrete ‘other’ topos that stands in opposition to another concrete topos (i.e., that of the self); it is the topos of the other as such, insofar as it is the place of the indeterminate. It is important to note here that for Rancière, this ‘other’ is not the absolute Other in the Lacanian sense, which stands in for “the unrepresentable, the unthinkable, the untreatable, the irredeemable.” The ‘other’ – the heteron – to which Rancière refers is instead that which is not exactly representable, thinkable or treatable within a particular distribution of places, identities and capacities. The ‘other,’ in other words, is not the culmination of a negation of sense or of a self. It is instead akin to a form of dissensus, what Rancière describes as “a difference between sense and sense,” where the other does not represent a conflict between who is counted and who is not, but instead a conflict about what it means to count, between two appearances of sense, and the way in which the counting is done. Rancière describes the political subject as ‘in-between’: “between several names, statuses, and identities; between humanity and inhumanity, citizenship and its denial; between the status of [worker] and the status of a speaking and thus thinking being. Political subjectivization is the enactment of equality […] by people who are together to the extent that they are between.”

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Political subjectivity is a ‘crossing of identities,’ between those who take part and the part with no part.

Subjectivation is a type of declassification that replaces the definition of the self that is created within the police order with a conception of the self-as-other. This is precisely the sense in which Rancière argues that “the logic of emancipation is a heterology.” I argue that there is, therefore, a supplementarity at the heart of subjectivity: politics is about the other, insofar as it is about verifying equality with others and in that it is directed at others rather than toward a ‘self.’ We must be careful to note here, however, that this ‘other’ does not represent a particular faction of the populace; it is instead a structural position. Rancière explains that the ‘all’ of ‘the people’ is actually “an empty, supplementary part that separates the community out from the sum of the parts of the social body.” The other, then, is that uncounted portion of the social body who is excluded from the community, “inscribed as a surplus in relation to every count of the parts of society.” The ‘outsider,’ then, is neither ‘outside’ of politics nor devoid of subjectivity. This figure is full of the potential for subjectivation by virtue of the fact that it has yet to be counted, and it is the figure to which politics is addressed. Political subjectivation, according to Rancière, is never simply the assertion of an identity but is also always the denial of an identity, the demonstration of equality, and the undertaking of an impossible identification. It is saying, “we are and are not.”

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563 Ibid., 58.
564 Rancière, *Dissensus*, 33.
565 Ibid., 33.
(ii) the ekstatic subject

the space-times of exclusion

In the last century, we have witnessed unprecedented levels of human displacement at both the local and international levels. Locally, those homeless who have been dispossessed of their property and possessions struggle to exist within a system where belonging – the ability to take part – is based on ownership. Though these people may have citizenship, they lack any form of agency through which to exercise their rights as citizens. To become an agent in the eyes of the state, one must have a permanent address. In light of the Charter, or even of the notion of universal human rights, this outside cannot really exist. And yet, we are confronted with its existence every day through the ‘uncanny’ figure of homelessness, in both the literal and figurative senses, the ‘subject not at home.’ At the international level, those millions of people who have been dispossessed of their citizenship in addition to their property and possessions are paradoxically consigned to an existence ‘outside’ of a state system that continues, even in the face of globalization, to present itself as both total (absolute) and closed (complete). In the intersection of these two levels – for example, in the figures of (and differences between) the ‘resident alien,’ the ‘non-resident alien,’ ‘illegal alien,’ ‘immigrant,’ and ‘nonimmigrant’ used in U.S. immigration terminology – locating this ‘outside’ becomes even more problematic.\textsuperscript{567} In each case, we must begin with the questions of what this outside is and how we can locate it in a system that forecloses upon/negates the very existence of an outside. Only then can we begin to understand the ‘outside,’ not as a physical/geo-spatial determination, but as an ideological (and thus highly contingent) determination.

First and foremost, in attempting to grapple with the problem of locating the ‘outside’ in a system that is purported to be closed, we must look beyond the map and beyond any notion of a material-spatial or territorial exteriority. It is precisely here, in the attempt to engage this question of ‘if not where, then whence?’ that I see an undeniable value of both aesthetic and philosophical/ontological interventions in politics. By beginning with this aesthetic approach, we can reformulate the terms of the problem itself. From this perspective, it is no longer a matter of determining the location of a physical ‘outside,’ but is instead a matter of understanding the sense of being outside, both in terms of its presentation as given, and the meaning that we attribute to it in its signification. I argue that this dual understanding of ‘the sense of being outside’ has at least two further designations: spatial and temporal. Its spatial dimension can be characterized in terms of lacking a place and/or of being unable to appear. Rancière’s ‘part with no part’ describes this sense accurately, insofar as we can recall that those with ‘no part’ have been rendered invisible and inaudible within the given distribution of the social. Badiou’s ‘inexistent’ describes a similar position. This part with no part is made up of actual people, who do exist and who ‘take up space’ through the fact of their material, physical existence. The sense in which they have been rendered invisible and inaudible is also connected to Nancy’s understanding of sense, in this case regarding the absence of meaning. The ‘part with no part’ has no part in a particular distribution of the sensible precisely because that particular distribution is unable to ‘make sense’ of them. The part with no part is therefore ‘placed’ outside of the structure of meaning around which that particular distribution of the social has been formed. There is, therefore, an intimate connection between ‘taking part’ and ‘making sense,’ in the sense that one’s ability to be perceived and understood is rendered either possible or impossible through the current distribution of the sensible. Politics is, therefore, the force that opens the possibility of their
making sense, of determining a ‘place’ for that which was previously rendered indeterminate and ‘dis-placed’ in the existing distribution of the social.

Building a politics upon the radical displacement of people(s) – whether in the material/spatial sense of forced displacement, the ontological sense in being reduced to a condition of bare life, the aesthetic sense of having been displaced through a particular distribution of the sensible, the critical theoretical sense of disidentification and/or supplementarity, or in this case, all of these together – requires us to make a radical shift in our understanding of the relations between politics and subject formation, between identity and power, and between collectivity and exclusion. As I argued in chapter 1, we are moving away from the modern “politics in totality” that is premised upon ‘closed’ systems (even in the face of globalization) toward a post-foundational “politics of totality,” which culminates in a deconstruction of totality through which totality is revealed to be incomplete, rife with exceptions and gaps, and under constant attack from the impossible ‘outside’ against which it defines itself. It is because of this deconstructive gesture that we now speak of a politics in transition, a politics that is perpetually at play, fluid, changing, disrupting and retreating, resisting those forms of stasis that have now come to be associated with (small ‘p’) politics, policy, ‘right names,’ identity and, perhaps most importantly, ‘ends’ (the ‘end of history,’ for example).

Thus, in addition to opening alternative ways of apprehending people and places through newly emerging forms of subjectivity, relations between subjects, and the deconstruction of inside/outside, possible/impossible, immanence/transcendence, etc., it is accompanied by a new teleology, namely one that remains open to its own ‘unworking.’ The reason why I assert that this particular form of temporality is of critical importance here is simply that teleology is the primary approach we take, not only to our understanding of time
itself, but also of history and thus the temporality that we assign to other discourses which are firmly rooted in that history, such as sociology and politics. For example, we locate the unity both of the self (self-realization) and of the social (peaceful consensus) in a particular kind of narrative of ends. These forms of unity are therefore directly linked to a temporality that has the appearance of being self-conscious, self-realizing, and self-driven or inevitable. I argue, however, that a temporality that is grounded in ends, in inevitability, though it may appear to move toward something (for example, through the narrative of ‘progress’), is actually a rigid temporality that remains firmly fixed in the metaphysics of presence. An excellent example of what I am calling an ‘inoperative teleology’ can be found in an account of democracy once offered by Judith Butler, where she writes, “democracy is secured precisely through its resistance to realization. Whatever goals are achieved […] democracy itself remains unachieved.” In Derridian terms, we might think of it in terms of the messianic figured as an expression of radical democracy; in Lacanian terms, we might think of it as the interminable engagement with a desire for the political, which is fueled, reinforced and sustained by the fact that it is ultimately unattainable. The danger here, however, is that its status as unachievable also provides rhetorical fuel for anti-democratic ideologies and governments to argue that democracy is ultimately ineffective.

I would like to emphasize this point that a politics that possesses an inoperative teleology is not the same as a politics that is ateleological. We can define teleology loosely in terms of a striving, as that which seeks to account for certain objects, concepts and phenomena via their ends or purposes. An ateleological position, on the other hand, would focus not on ends or purposes, but rather on maintaining the coherence and harmony of the system itself. Perhaps a ‘radical presence.’ In this project, however, the events, ruptures, and

disruptions which make up our political reality ultimately erupt out of a place of groundlessness, and therefore there is no foundation from which one could strive toward a particular end or purpose, nor is there a defining principle around which to construct and maintain a coherent system of thought. There is movement, but its movement is that of circulation rather than linearity. It emphasizes the temporary over the eternal, not unlike post-structural accounts of repetition, where neither the subject who returns nor the objective environment to which it returns is ever the same in any repetition. I reject the descriptor ateleological for this politics precisely because that which is atelological renders its content immobile; it fixes the subject in one place, thus not allowing for the movement of becoming, and it can’t help but define itself in terms of some form of strict division between ‘inside’ and ‘outside.’ I retain the term ‘teleology,’ very specifically in Kant’s second sense of having to do with purposiveness rather than ends, precisely because in this discussion politics does retain a purpose, and that purpose is revelation in each sense of the word: exposure, appearance, unveiling, disclosure, surprise, and perhaps even the demonstration of a ‘divine’ will, though in this case not a ‘heavenly’ will but rather a will to discern, a will to perceive.

‘Figuring’ the inexistent

After decades of suspicion or outright rejection on behalf of a majority of post-structural and postmodern theorists, the political subject has been enjoying a mini-renaissance as an object of critical inquiry. This re-engagement with the subject does not seek to re-form it as a constitutive or transcendental ground out of which certain practices

569 We can also think of Blanchot’s désoeuvrement, which is evoked by Nancy in The Inoperative Community, as well as Benjamin’s ‘means without end’ to clarify this idea; each of these thinkers affirms what amounts to an ‘unworking of work’ (art, politics, community, etc.) as a challenge to traditional understandings of teleology as ‘progress’ or as a ‘means/ends’ relation.
570 The best collection of writings on this notion of moving past the subject can be found in Cadava, et al., eds., Who Comes After the Subject?
would emerge. Instead, the subject is constituted in and through these practices as an effect.

We must be careful, however, not to assume that this subject is entirely produced by the prevailing regimes of power and knowledge or of government rationality. For example, while Foucault’s theories of governmentality tend to focus on the formation of the subject within governmental practices, the theory of the subject that thinkers such as Rancière, Nancy and Badiou have introduced focuses upon the subject’s formation against these practices. This subject emerges through what Rancière calls a ‘disidentification,’ which can be understood as an act of distancing oneself from one’s positive identity or ‘right place’ without completely forsaking it. As Sergei Prozorov points out in his Introduction to Theory of the Political Subject, this also means that we might instead look to Foucault’s later work, where Foucault’s approach to subjectivity comes to revolve around the question of ‘how not to be governed.’ If we work with the idea that disidentification is itself a politics, the potential for political subjectivation becomes universal insofar as it is accompanied by such an experience.

Among other things, this means that those various figures through whom we have introduced the possibility/impossibility of an ‘outside’ of politics – homo sacer, the subaltern, the stranger, the part with no part, the inexistent – are not politically impotent figures, but hypothetically retain an even greater latent potential for political subjectivation in this formulation because of the very condition of externality which has been imposed upon

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572 Jacques Rancière, Disagreement, 36.

573 Sergei Prozorov, Theory of the Political Subject (New York: Routledge, 2014), xxvi. My emphasis. Foucault’s later work to which Prozorov refers can be found in examples such as Michel Foucault, “What is Critique?” in The Politics of Truth, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 1997), 41-81.
them. To be clear, this is in no way a value judgment on my part: I am not attempting to cast this kind of forced exclusion in a ‘positive’ light or argue that it is a ‘good.’ Instead, I am seeking to explore a source of empowerment for those who appear to be trapped in the condition of extreme limitation, inequality and isolation that is associated with this kind of exclusion. Identity politics is based on a shared experience of injustice, but it is rooted in a concept of justice that belongs to the very socio-political system from which those figures mentioned above have been excluded. Identity politics cannot be a viable source of empowerment for these figures because they exist ‘outside’ of any economy of social relations that could establish them as subjects to be counted in the first place. Where identity politics tends to envision a singular unity that can be collectivized under one name, the disidentifying, excluded figure remains stubbornly plural.

In Theory of the Political Subject, Sergei Prozorov argues that a form of Heidegger’s ontological difference (the difference between Being and beings) manifests in the difference between our ontological being-in-the-World, characterized by absolute freedom, equality and community, and our ontic being-in-the-world, in which these very axioms are either relativized as instruments of the transcendental order or simply negated.574 I have already discussed some of the ways in which this difference plays out with regard to freedom, equality and community in chapter 4. While this discussion of politics of course still assumes freedom, equality and community as its objects, my focus here is upon a particular effect that the ontological difference has had upon the subject. Specifically, we locate the subject’s emergence somewhere between its ontological existence and its ontic situation or identity, that frame whose verification of subjecthood is premised on a wrong identification, a blurring

574 Prozorov, Theory of the Political Subject, 2.
of the distinction between what is part of the self as a work and what is outside of it. It is to this ‘in-betweenness’ that we will now return, edging ever closer to the void.

One particular aspect of ‘the situation’ is crucial to this discussion, namely, that it straddles the distinction between inside and outside, between elements that ‘belong’ and those deemed not to belong, the latter of which Badiou names the void. In the translators’ Introduction to Badiou’s *Infinite Thought*, Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens describe the void of the situation in the following way: “the void is the ‘unnamed’ and the ‘not-thought’ in the situation. It is not, however, a species of nonbeing, although it may appear to be ‘nothing’ from within the situation. Rather, it is being that literally ‘does not count’ according to the criteria that define the situation.”

In every situation, there is a ‘nothing’ that necessarily goes uncounted, since whatever is recognized as ‘something’ is counted-for-one in that situation. It is important to note, however, as Feltham and Clemens do, that “it is not as though there is simply nothing in a situation which is uncounted – both the operation of the count-for-one and the inconsistent multiple which exists before the count are, by definition, uncountable.” Peter Hallward clarifies the effects of this counting in relation to the subject. He notes that every situation has its own particular ways of ‘authorizing’ and ‘qualifying’ individuals within it as legitimate members of that situation. Thus, he goes on to explain, “the void of such a situation includes whatever can only be presented, in the situation, as utterly unqualified or unauthorized. It is precisely these unqualified or indiscernible capacities that make up the very being of the situation.”

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576 Ibid.
577 Ibid.
Hallward’s reading of the void points to one of its most significant features. This void is more than simply that which collects what is excluded: paradoxically, it is also the situation’s ‘ground,’ or that upon which it relies for its being.\textsuperscript{579} It constitutes the situation through the fact of its exclusion. The situation cannot exist as such without that which it excludes. Badiou characterizes the ontological difference in terms of the difference between \textit{being} and \textit{appearance}. In \textit{Logics of Worlds}, Badiou introduces his concept of the ‘inexistent,’ which he describes as that which “ultimately delineates a being which appears in this world at the edge of the void of appearance itself, [designating] a being which is undoubtedy (ontologically) ‘of the world,’ but which is not absolutely in the world according to the strict logic of appearing.”\textsuperscript{580} Each object that appears in the world contains an inexistent – that is, an element that does \textit{not} appear, or appears as ‘nothing.’ The construction of universal or transcendental principles works to cover over this void so that the appearance of the inexistent is minimal or nil. If we understand the world as a structure of appearing, the inexistent highlights the contingency of such an understanding. In Badiou’s words, “there is a reserve of being which, subtracted from appearance, traces within this appearance the fact that it is always contingent for such a being to appear there.”\textsuperscript{581}

Badiou’s use of the example of Quebec’s legislation on suffrage between 1918 and 1950 illustrates this concept clearly.\textsuperscript{582} Suffrage is ‘universal’ in Quebec at this time, referring to the inclusion of women, but it excludes the Inuit, Metis and First Nations populations. Thus, “the object ‘civic capacity of the Quebecois populations’ admits as its proper inexistent, during this temporal sequence, the set of ‘Indians.’ This means that said [peoples]

\textsuperscript{579} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{580} Badiou, \textit{Logics of Worlds}, 324.
\textsuperscript{581} Ibid., 322.
\textsuperscript{582} He has chosen this time frame specifically because Quebecois women were granted the right to vote in 1918, but the Indigineous peoples of Quebec were not included until 1950 (Inuit) and 1960 (Metis and First Nations).
have no electoral existence.”

One who has no rights ‘inexists’ with regard to rights; thus this one’s “degree of identity to the one who has all the rights is nil.”

Put succinctly, Badiou concludes that the term “Indian” therefore designates “the inexistential element of the object ‘civic and political rights’ with regard to the transcendental ‘Quebec-between-1918-and-1950’.”

The inexistential is ontologically ‘of the world,’ and yet is not ‘in the world’ according to the logic of appearing. This is evident in the fact that the Indigenous peoples of Quebec during this time were not Quebeois because they did not have the civic and political rights that govern the appearing of Quebeois citizens, and yet they were also not absolutely ‘non-Quebeois,’ because Quebec constituted their ‘site of appearance.’

The inexistential of an object is, therefore, “suspended between (ontological) being and a certain form of (logical) non-being.”

Prior to his development of the ‘inexistent,’ Badiou had already introduced the closely related notion of the ‘situated void.’ The situated void of a situation, like the inexistential, cannot appear except through the intervention of the event. Badiou writes:

At the heart of every situation, as the foundation of its being, there is a ‘situated’ void, around which is organized the plenitude (of the stable multiples) of the situation in question. […] The proletariat – being entirely dispossessed and absent from the political stage – is that around which is organized the complacent plenitude established by the rule of those who possess capital. The fundamental ontological characteristic of an event is to inscribe, to name, the situated void of that for which it is an event.

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583 Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 323.
584 Ibid., 323.
585 Ibid., 324.
586 Ibid., 324.
587 Ibid., 324.
588 Badiou, *Ethics*.
589 Ibid., 68-69.
Put another way, the present democratic social order (and its every surplus – ‘the people,’ consensus, unity, community, the ontic realizations of freedom and equality) is built upon a void or absence. The very appearance of the social order is premised upon the minimal appearance of this void. This means, for example, that the appearance of equality is dependent upon a fundamental inequality: the inexistent object must be equal to nothing in order for the plenitude of equality to appear in the democratic social order. Likewise, since the inexistent is by definition not ‘there’ in a place where it could be free, we are in no position to pose the question of its freedom. The inexistent is excluded from being-in-common with those whose maximal appearance precludes it.

It is important to note here that it is not the bare existence (being) of the inexistent that is negated, but rather the appearance of its existence. Both the ‘inexistent’ and the ‘existent’ are in the world ontologically speaking, but on the ontic/phenomenal level, the inexistent is outside it. Returning to Prozorov’s reading, he explains that “something can only inexist as a result of a transcendental negation that excludes a being from appearance while maintaining it in its being.” He links the relationship between the ‘inexistent object’ and the ‘transcendental order’ to the relationship between Schmitt’s ‘sovereign,’ (the one who decides on the exception) and Agamben’s homo sacer (the being that is always vulnerable to arbitrary sovereign violence). Prozorov notes the symmetry between the position of the sovereign and that of the inexistent: “both are ontologically in the world yet phenomenally outside it, the former in the mode of majestic-pseudo-transcendence and the latter in the form of abject, zero-degree immanence.”

590 Prozorov, Theory of the Political Subject, 3.
591 Ibid., 3.
592 Ibid., 3.
inexistent; the inexistent is that object in relation to which any being of the world, no matter how humble, can perceive itself as sovereign.\(^{593}\)

Since, however, inexistence is never *innate* in a being, its status is always contingent.\(^{594}\) The event, then, performs an operation whereby the inexistent is taken from a state of phenomenal exclusion and allowed to appear, and appear as sovereign. This is also true for the status of ‘existence’ (appearance): since it is also never innate, the event also has the power to effect a suppression of appearance and thus also the appearance of sovereignty. Unlike identity politics, then, post-foundational politics is not aimed at overcoming the inexistence of a particular object, seeking to grant it a greater degree of existence on the basis of that particularity. Post-foundational politics instead seeks to overcome the transcendental *function* of assigning inexistence itself, regardless of what particular objects are subjected to it.\(^{595}\) For Badiou, this will have taken place through the event. For Rancière, the presupposition of equality negates this function. Nancy would insist that we continually ‘unwork’ any axiom that contradicts the ontological condition of singular plurality. Finally, Badiou himself concedes a deep connection between his notion of inexistence and Derrida’s *différance*, explaining that, “whatever form of discursive imposition one may be faced with, there exists a point that escapes the rules of this imposition, a *point of flight.*”\(^{596}\) There is no ‘truth’ that is beyond contingency. In Derrida’s case, when a word ‘means,’ it does so by differing; what it differs *from*, however, becomes an inescapable, absent part of its ‘presence.’ Likewise, for Badiou, when a thing exists, it does so by differing from that which

\(^{593}\) Ibid., 3.
\(^{594}\) Ibid., 3.
\(^{595}\) Ibid., 4. Although Prozorov here has introduced and is referring to his own notion of ‘world politics’ rather than a more generalized post-foundational politics, the attending logic is extremely useful in describing the task/function of post-foundational politics as it pertains to the work of Badiou, Rancière, Nancy, and others.
inexists, whereby the inexistent becomes an inevitable, absent part of the presence of each existent.

The aim of political practice as Badiou and Rancière prescribe it (and of which I believe Nancy and Derrida would approve) is essentially to consign into inexistence those aspects of the transcendental that work to deny freedom, equality and collective action.

“Thus,” Prozorov explains, “when we pose the question of what the inexistent of the world is, we do not inquire about the attributes of particular beings who happen to inexist in this world but rather about what axioms this world negates, thereby relegating a multiplicity of beings to inexistence […].” This is perhaps the clearest example of why I have included Badiou as one of the thinkers with whom to argue that we require a strategy other than identity politics to combat oppression, subjugation and marginalization. Put simply, this alternative politics does not look at the particular identity traits of who is ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ a particular socio-political configuration. Instead, it examines the transcendental function of delineating an inside and an outside in the first place in order to deconstruct those categories and open alternative modes of appearing. The ‘outside’ or inexistent of a situation cannot appear without some form of collective political intervention that levels the ontological difference and forces a new presentation of what was previously inexistent. It is important to emphasize, however, that this externality is itself merely an appearance – or rather a sense – that possesses both a corporeal dimension (the sense of externality) and a universally communicable dimension (the sense of externality).
Dispossession and ‘becoming-stateless’

The word ‘possession’ comes from the Latin *possideo*, which, when divided into its two roots, means ‘able to, or having the power to sit,’ to find a resting place.\(^\text{597}\) Thus possession also implies the ability or power to remain in one place, as opposed to being forced to wander, having a defined place in the world as opposed to being stateless. Dispossession is generally understood in terms of lack: a lack of possessions, the absence of ownership, the deprivation of knowledge, and/or a lack of control, or finally, with regard to the above discussion, being unable to sit, and thus, being forced to wander. Dispossession is most often associated politically with the violence of colonization, but it is of course even more widespread that this, encompassing myriad domestic and international crises including poverty, homelessness, refugeeism, forced migration, statelessness, and exile. Compounding this problem is the tendency among those who have a place to cast the dispossessed in a negative light, as deficient, suspicious, or contaminated in some way. Interestingly, the word ‘insidious’ also shares the root ‘sed’ from the Middle French *insidere* as ‘taking or occupying a place to sit.’\(^\text{598}\) Thus, those who already have the power to sit are juxtaposed against those who, in a potential act of resistance, must forcefully *take a seat* in order to be recognized. Perhaps the source of the unfortunate connection between activism and destruction, where activism is seen as harmful or threatening, can be located here in the tension between those who have the power to sit and those who must *take a seat*, or between those who have a place and those who struggle to *take place*, to present themselves, to enact their dispossession in order to resist it. Although each of these problems is vast and complex, what they share is a

\(^{597}\) “Possess,” Online Etymology Dictionary [https://www.etymonline.com/word/possess](https://www.etymonline.com/word/possess) (accessed May 4, 2018). I would like to credit (and thank) Allan Pero for this entire discussion on the etymology of and connection between the words ‘possess’ and ‘insidious,’ which he very generously proposed in his comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

tendency to be understood as issues of human rights. Human rights discourse, however, has
done little to overcome or even interrupt dispossession because it reproduces the language of
possessive individualism.

Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou’s discussion of dispossession, published under
the title *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*, begins from the point of view that
the idea of the unified, internally coherent subject serves a form of power that must be
counteracted.599 Moreover, any reader of Judith Butler will anticipate the issue she takes with
the language by which human rights are identified as something we *possess* and are *granted*,
and thus can also be stripped of. Instead, a performative account of rights – like that of
identity or subjectivity – identifies right not as something that one *has*, but rather as
something that one *does*. Against this conflation of right and property, Athanasiou and Butler
propose a second understanding of dispossession as “a form of ethical and political
responsibility that emerges only when a sovereign and unitary subject can be effectively
challenged, and that this fissuring of the subject, or its constituting ‘difference,’ proves
central for a politics that challenges both property and sovereignty in specific ways.”600

To be clear, the authors do not propose this second understanding of dispossession in
place of the first. Instead, *Dispossession* documents a conversation through which the authors
begin to articulate a theory of political performativity that takes both understandings of
dispossession into account by reframing it as something that one can simultaneously embody
and resist. They ask the question of how one could become dispossessed of the sovereign self
in order to enter into forms of collectivity that oppose those other forms of dispossession that
are marked by injustice, exclusion and oppression.601 I add that part of this process of

599 Preface to Butler and Athanasiou, *Dispossession*, ix.
600 Ibid., ix.
601 Ibid., xi.
becoming ‘dispossessed of the sovereign self’ necessarily involves both a fundamental disidentification (or the identification with a ‘wrong’), as well as a radical rethinking of those forms of freedom, equality and community that are grounded in the primacy of the individual as a sovereign self. The dialogue that unfolds in this text is centered upon the themes of responsibility and resistance, namely in terms of public space activism. What this amounts to, borrowing from an earlier Butler, is a ‘troubling’ of dispossession that manifests as an embodied political responsiveness and is played out in collective public gatherings and demonstrations. These bodies (literally) stand both for and against their own exclusion, their lack; they enact their dispossession so as to resist it.

This notion that dispossession is also a form of political responsiveness demands that we think about dispossession, not only in terms of exceeding the logic of possessive individualism, but in terms of exceeding “the humanitarian log(ist)ics of taking possession of the other (whereby the ‘other’ is a misnomer for those with no proper name).” The authors here refer to discourses of victimhood that actually work to erase not only the victims themselves and those who stand against ‘victimhood,’ but also the very appearance of injustice through its naturalization and depoliticization. Athanasiou cites as her example the ways in which vulnerability is appropriated for use as a norm through which potential immigrants and asylum seekers are regulated. This appropriation gives rise to the creation of a hierarchy of needs against which all humanitarian claims are measured and by virtue of which the appeals of migrants and asylum seekers are ultimately accepted or denied. It is for this reason that Athanasiou argues that discourses of victimization and charity are often

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602 Ibid., 112. My emphasis.
603 Ibid., 112-113.
604 Ibid., 113.
favored over discourses of political claims (such as a fear of persecution).\textsuperscript{605} Thus the objectification and management of immigrants and refugees as “feminized, victimized, and coerced bodies, or as diseased and afflicted bodies” is institutionalized through humanitarian reason, provoking responses that tend to be paternalistic and sentimental.\textsuperscript{606}

All of this is not to say that we should completely do away with the language of victimization, however. As Butler notes in her response, “the problem arises only when the discourse of victimization precludes the possibility of effective political organizing and resistance to the cause of the injury.”\textsuperscript{607} Thus the possibility for the language of victimization to lead to organized resistance remains, so long as it is used to address injustices directly and resists appropriation on behalf of various nationalistic or humanitarian agendas that would seek to use it as a legitimizing force. Pausing for a moment here, we can see two lines of questioning emerge. First, we have the notion that dispossession has the potential to become an alternative mode of political subjectivation rather than being seen only as an abject condition; and second, we are pointed toward Butler’s work on ‘precarious life,’ which is arguably focused upon the politicization of a particular form of social ontology that does not rely on a pre-determined notion of who counts as human and who does not. Though I go on to explore the latter in the following section on ‘the politics of mortal vulnerability,’ for now my focus will remain fixed upon dispossession as a potential mode of political subjectivation by looking at the example of ‘statelessness.’

Robert Kaiser’s chapter in \textit{Performativity, Politics, and the Production of Social Space} titled, “Performativity, Events, and Becoming-Stateless,” examines the notion of a

\textsuperscript{605} Ibid., 113.
\textsuperscript{606} Ibid., 114.
\textsuperscript{607} Ibid., 115. (My emphasis)
‘performative state’ from the exteriorized perspective of statelessness. Working through the example of post-Soviet Estonia, Kaiser interrogates the interconnectedness of events, performativity and becoming, both to demonstrate how events can render the performative nature of nations and states visible, and to explore the deterritorializing effects of these ruptures insofar as they contain alternate possibilities for political subjectivation and more ‘radically democratic effects.’ To this end, he brings together Butler, Rancière, Deleuze, Mouffe and others, examining the ways in which the production of statelessness created a rupture that destabilized not only the performative enactment of independence (in his own example, the creation of a free Estonia), but also the condition of statelessness itself. What is of greatest interest here is his argument that statelessness has undergone a shift from being an ‘abject condition’ to becoming an alternative mode of political subjectivation (in Rancière’s usage), which Kaiser claims also acts as a “performative ‘dis-identification’ that poses a potential problem for the nation-state system as such.” While a great deal of emphasis has been placed on the ways in which certain categories are performatively normalized, Kaiser rightly points out that less emphasis has been put on Butler’s own political agenda, through which she looks for the political possibilities that are opened up by performativity to say and do identity differently.

Statelessness is undeniably linked to deterritorialization, not just in the obvious sense of its being a condition of lacking a territory, but also in the sense of one’s having been placed ‘outside’ the set of social, cultural and political relations in which they had previously

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609 Ibid., 257.
610 Ibid., 258.
611 Ibid., 259.
taken part. Deleuze and Guattari discuss deterritorialization specifically in terms of its economic and psychic manifestations, but more generally, we can understand deterritorialization as a process that decontextualizes a given set of relations, rendering them ‘virtual’ and preparing them for future re interpretations. Deleuze also refers to this process of abstraction in his later work as ‘counter-actualization,’ which works to destabilize and disrupt a particular set of relations or state of affairs. We have already encountered variations of this figure already in Chapter 1, including Agamben’s homo sacer, Spivak’s subaltern, Bauman’s stranger, and Lyotard’s victim. Typically, these figures are always posed in opposition to or outside of a specific set of social, cultural and political relations. They are either constituted in this outside or forced there through a specific wrong. Reading the phenomenon of statelessness through performativity, as Kaiser does, traces a movement parallel to that which we have already rehearsed at length: namely, that the performative enactment of a particular identity simultaneously produces its own constitutive outside through an exclusion. In the case of post-Soviet Estonia that Kaiser traces, the performative enactment of Estonia/Estonian-ness simultaneously established Russia/Russian-ness as its constitutive outside, which Kaiser refers to as its “anti-matter.” He argues that statelessness came to serve as a “hard-bordered containment vessel for the Russian anti-matter that was present in the state at the time of independence,” and that its manifestation served to disrupt

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612 For example, please see Balázs Majtényi and György Majtényi, A Contemporary History of Exclusion: The Roma Issue in Hungary from 1945 to 2015 (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2016).

613 Economic deterritorialization can be understood as the liberation of labour power from specific means of production; psychic deterritorialization can be understood in the context of Freud’s introduction of the ‘libido,’ which Deleuze and Guattari champion as a freeing of desire. Deleuze and Guattari discuss the processes of both economic and psychic deterritorialization at length in Anti-Oedipus, trans. Robert Hurley et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 296-322.

614 See for example, Gilles Deleuze, The Logic of Sense, trans. Mark Lester (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), where he introduces the term on p. 150.

615 Kaiser, “Performativity, Events, and Becoming-Stateless,” 287.
“the chains of citational practices that performatively produce and stabilize nation and state.”

Despite efforts to close these gaps, statelessness was not fully reterritorialized. In the process, statelessness has undergone a transformation from its inception as a performative speech-act in the creation of an independent Estonia, eventually becoming a “political subject position of dis-identification performatively enacted by the stateless themselves.” Thus Kaiser sees a new discourse of political subjectivation emerging in an unexpected place in an unexpected way. Returning to *Dispossession*, this is precisely Butler’s argument about what performativity in her own understanding has the power to achieve:

> [W]hen the undocumented claim their rights in public, or when large demonstrations against austerity measures emerge within European capitals, groups of bodies whose speech and actions are not fully separable from each other enter together into established conventions and re-establish them in new forms and for new purposes. […] We might say: the performative emerges precisely as the specific power of the precarious – unauthorized by existing legal regimes, abandoned by the law itself – to demand the end to their precarity.

Statelessness, dispossession and inexistence all share in that sense of vulnerability derived through being forced into a bare existence: existence ‘outside’ the law, in the sense that it does not acknowledge them or offer any protection, but nevertheless subservient to the law, in the sense that their inexistence is that against which the subject of the law defines itself. And yet, it is out of this vulnerability to injury that the potential for another mode of political subjectivation emerges.

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616 Ibid., 287.
617 Ibid., 288.
618 Athanasiou and Butler, “Dispossession,” 121.
the politics of mortal vulnerability

What has ou la mort come to mean today? Now, as in the past, there is an overt link between ‘ou la mort’ and violence (for example, the threat of violent death in revolution), and it is easy to make the argument that ‘ou la mort’ is itself a form of violence (insofar as it presents an impossible alternative). It represents both a threat and a promise; it is designed to unsettle, offering both certainty and unknowability. Questions of life and death have always been at the forefront of politics, not just in terms of biopower, where bodies are regulated, classified, and managed, but also, as we have seen, in terms of the intertwining of ontological, aesthetic and phenomenological questions regarding the relation between politics, existence and appearance. In this section, I examine the notion that not only is politics shaped by this kind of threat, but that it perhaps ought to be in order to foster a more ethical relation to the other. No longer only belonging to revolution, some thinkers – including Judith Butler and Roberto Esposito – have placed ou la mort at the forefront of politics. Both of these thinkers move away from the traditional thinking of politics, government and law as offering security and protection against both external and internal threats. Butler frames the politics of vulnerability though her examination of precariousness, and Esposito focuses his own examination through the concept of immunization.

Butler’s treatment of precariousness and vulnerability describes a politics that is defined not only by the potential for injury, but also by the imperative of being affected by others. It is, for Butler, the creation of “a world in which collective means are found to protect bodily vulnerability without precisely eradicating it.”619 Questions of life and death are at the forefront of both Precarious Life and Frames of War.620 In these volumes, Butler develops a theory of precarity and precariousness that, rather than referring to economics, is

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framed entirely in terms of life and death, specifically in response to the US-led War on Terror. She draws a stark distinction between two terms here. First, ‘precarity’ is understood as a form of vulnerability that is associated with the destruction of the conditions of ‘livability’ through poverty, dispossession, war, natural disaster, etc. ‘Precariousness,’ on the other hand, is viewed as a universal physical vulnerability that is tied to mortality. In Butler’s distinction, then, the fragility of the body performs a double function of differentiation and equalization. Through precariousness, we acknowledge that all bodies are vulnerable to suffering, injury and death; through precarity, we come to see that some bodies are much more exposed to this violence than others. Precariousness is universally shared, whereas precarity is “distributed unequally.”

In the Preface to Precarious Life, Butler describes the essays collected in the volume as a response to “the conditions of heightened vulnerability and aggression that followed from [the events of September 11, 2001].” Far from being limited to a single event, however, her reflections in this text take up the problematic connection between vulnerability and aggression in political life more broadly. This is, of course, not a new connection; nor is it of recently emerging relevance to politics. Arguably, it is this connection that has fueled political discourse from its first moments, and has been the driving force of revolution and war. Her aim is to prompt us to interrupt this connection in order to begin to imagine non-violent political responses to injury and grief. The aspect of this inquiry that will be the object of my focus is what she calls “a fundamental dependence on anonymous others.”

The insight associated with this condition, which is only given to us through injury, is that

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621 For a view of precarity and its connection to politics in material terms, see Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter, “Precarity as a Political Concept, or, Fordism as Exception” in Theory Culture Society 25, no. 7-8 (2008): 51-72.
622 Butler, Frames of War, 25.
623 Butler, Precarious Life, xi.
624 Ibid., xii.
there are others ‘out there’ in the world that I do not know but upon whom my life depends. No amount of retaliatory violence, no security measure, and no measure of sheer will can change this fact. Butler argues that vulnerability will serve as the basis for a new kind of community through the construction of a politics of shared vulnerability.

This vulnerability at the heart of political life echoes something fundamental from Esposito’s *Communitas*: “what men have in common, what makes them more like each other than anything else, is their generalized capacity to be killed: the fact that anyone can be killed by anyone else.”625 This Hobbesian understanding of our common situation, according to Esposito, provokes what he calls the ‘immunization response’ through which “life is sacrificed to the preservation of life. In this convergence of the preservation of life and its capacity to be sacrificed, modern immunization reaches the height of its own destructive power.”626 Esposito argues, for example, that modern liberal regimes safeguard the life of the political body by driving out and/or eliminating any internal threat (Nazi biopolitics is often cited as an example of this phenomenon). An externalized immune response can be just as deadly, coming in the form of “preventative war” such as the War on Terror, which is a paradoxical form of war waged in the name of preventing violence.627 Esposito’s concentration on immunity can be compared to Butler’s recent attempts to, “provide a way of thinking about how we are not only constituted by our relations but also dispossessed by them as well.”628 Timothy Campbell points out that Esposito diverges from Butler, however, in his use of the language of an always already immunized and immunizing munus. This suggests that “while Butler is clearly right in affirming the importance of relationality for imagining community, and hoped-for future community constructed on ‘the social

626 Ibid., 14.
627 See Esposito, *Bios*, 47. This intuition about the War on Terror is echoed in Butler’s *Frames of War*.
vulnerability of bodies’ will founder on the implicit threat contained in any relation among
the same socially constructed bodies.”^629

Put another way, a collection of socially interdependent bodies isn’t necessarily
vulnerable, but might nevertheless increase calls for protection because of a ‘presumed
enemy.’^630 According to Campbell, Esposito is doing something different: “the articulation of
a political semantics that can lead to a nonimmunized (or radically communitized) life.”^631 At
its most basic level, immunization is about the preservation of life by means of both
defensive and offensive protection against an external threat. At times, the means of
preservation can become extremely insular and excessive, and the remedy that Esposito sees
to this oppressive isolation is community. He writes:

If immunity tends to enclose our existence in circles or fences, which do not
communicate with each other, the community, more than a bigger circle
which comprehends them, is rather an opening which, cutting the boundaries,
mixes human experiences, freeing them from their securing obsession
[ossessione assicurativa].^632

If we can recall, community is defined by Esposito as the totality of persons who are united
by a lack. Like Nancy, Esposito argues that community can be thought neither as a ‘body’ (as
in the Leviathan), nor as a mutual recognition or collective bond that connects previously
separate individuals: “the community isn't a mode of being, much less a ‘making’ of the
individual subject. It isn't the subject's expansion or multiplication but its exposure to what
interrupts the closing and turns it inside out: a dizziness, a syncope, a spasm in the continuity

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^630 Ibid., 6.
^631 Ibid.
2017).
of the subject.” 633 It prevents the closure of identity. Community is a supplement – it is a response to an external threat; it shows that the immune response is lacking, while at the same time constitutes a surplus in relation to that response. In a similar sense to Butler’s work on precariousness, Esposito’s conception of community is a product of an interdependency born out of mutual vulnerability to these various forms of violence, though the end product is quite different.

Butler encourages us to “start to imagine a world in which that violence might be minimized, in which an inevitable interdependency becomes acknowledged as the basis for global political community.” 634 The ‘inevitable interdependency’ to which Butler refers is the shared vulnerability to suffering, injury and death that both she and Esposito take up as the basis for a communal politics. In order to clarify this notion of ‘inevitable interdependency,’ we turn back to Butler’s introduction to *Frames of War*. She writes: “precariousness grounds social obligations (paradoxically because precariousness is a kind of ‘ungrounding’ that constitutes a generalized condition for the human animal) at the same time that the aim of such obligations is to minimize precariousness and its unequal distribution.” 635 There is a lot to unpack here, but I will focus on two central points. First, this understanding of precariousness offers us an understanding of the human condition as ‘ungrounded,’ unsettled, uncertain, vulnerable, which we can reasonably assume carries through to the subject. Thus, precariousness is an *ungrounding*. At the same time, however, precariousness is a grounding; it ‘grounds social obligations’ – paradoxically, the primary obligation to minimize precariousness – and thus contains an ethical force as well. We are interdependent precisely because we are so vulnerable. What makes this interdependency ‘inevitable’ is that no one is

immune; it is part of the human condition, thus defining us even while it threatens our existence. This is where Butler and Esposito differ most greatly, despite their similar themes: for Butler, the community is founded upon mutual recognition of a shared precarious life with the function of attempting to minimize that precarity, whereas for Esposito, community drives a wedge into the movement of closure brought on by the immune response, thus perhaps minimizing the threat, but nevertheless leaving us open to it.

Butler treats precariousness as both an existential and a socio-political condition, whereas for Esposito, it seems to act more of a political safeguard [against fascism?]. Butler argues that precariousness is “not simply an existential condition of individuals, but rather a social condition from which certain clear political demands and principles emerge.” The refusal of a particular group to acknowledge its own mortality – that is, its ability to “immunize itself against the thought of its own precariousness” – is, according to Butler, responsible for the creation of the political inequalities that result in precarity. Butler ultimately argues that “mindfulness of this vulnerability can become the basis of claims for non-military political solutions, just as denial of this vulnerability through a fantasy of mastery (an institutionalized fantasy of mastery) can fuel the instruments of war.” The avowal of precariousness that is taken on by thinkers such as Butler and Esposito represents first and foremost a tension between, on one hand, an obligation to reframe all life as grievable, and on the other hand, an obligation to retain the spirit of dissensus that characterizes democratic politics.

There is a particular kind of vulnerability that for Butler and Esposito precedes the subject, that interpellates subjects, yet at the same time prevents them from becoming closed.

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636 Ibid., xxv.
637 Ibid., 48.
638 Butler, Precarious Life, 29.
off from others. One cannot help but draw a connection between this and the presupposition of equality that precedes subjectivation for Rancière. Yet this is not a generalized equality of intelligences, but instead an equality of circumstance, the difference being that an equality of intelligences is characterized as something internal or innate, whereas the equality of circumstance that is represented by shared vulnerability is something that is both imposed from the outside as well as (for Butler) an existential condition. The important difference here, as I see it, is that Rancière’s equality does not pre-determine a specific set of social relations. This means that equality does not have a ‘proper’ form to take in order to serve as the source/aim of politics. Butler, on the other hand, could arguably be said to suggest that the ‘proper’ form of equality in this context is the condition of precariousness. Does this mean that in order to subscribe to Butler’s politics of precariousness, one would have to inadvertently embrace domination at the same time? And the question which follows is, how can we avoid a revictimization of the political subject by preventing precariousness from settling into an identity?

(iii) A New Poetics of the Para-subject

It is only after the deconstruction of subjectivity that Nancy saw fit to pose the question, “Who comes after the subject?”639 There are, of course, as many potential responses to this question as there are theorists; yet following Derrida and Nancy, who would work to ‘exappropriate’ that which is ‘proper’ to the subject, I strongly believe that there is more to the idea of leaving the subject in a major indetermination, which opens it to being ‘questioned, transformed, surpassed’ in the same way that applies to our ability (or refusal) to

define what is proper to politics. The idea of moving ‘beyond’ the subject does not necessarily imply a ‘transcendence’ that would hurtle us toward a true post-, super- or anti-subject. As I will shortly explain, the ‘beyond’ that I describe is not a ‘beyond’ the subject that completely severs ties, but rather a beyond the subject that finds its situation beside, between, or as a supplement to. The political subject is ‘undecidable,’ both enhancing our understandings of politics and covering over the groundlessness that keeps it from being universalized. Like Rousseau’s Therese, perhaps the notion of a political subject in contemporary theory remains the very thing that enables us to conceive of being present and fulfilled in socio-political relations with one another. Going a step further, I argue that we might conceive of the subject as indetermination, or at least as creating indetermination wherever it is constituted.

This notion of looking ‘beyond’ the (traditional) subject, as I have attempted to do, is undertaken in order to uncover subjects in excess of subjectivity – perhaps ‘transimmanent subjectivities’ – lurking in the places that are typically figured as spaces of exclusion, of detaching the subject from itself (its-self) for the purpose of uncovering a new and unpredictable subject position. Rather than completely eradicating the traditional position, however, these alternate positions would serve to expose its fictive constitution and hold it on display. Borrowing from one of Foucault’s famous claims, one might say that the political task must no longer be framed in terms of discovering who we are, but rather in terms of refusing who we are. This does not amount to a complete rejection of everything except raw existence, but rather a side-stepping of the ‘who’ as a singular identity, as a question

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641 Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 216.
with a definitive answer. Thinking subjectivity in terms of the clinamen – untraceable because of its unpredictability, its curvilinearity – introduces the subject as the indeterminate element in the social field. This indeterminacy would free it (and us) from the constraints of both identity and community, and thus the closure of the immune response, while equipping it with a built-in resistance to domination. Perhaps, therefore, instead of thinking the ‘post-subject,’ a more correct designation for this figure would be the para-subject, which gathers all meanings of the prefix ‘para’ to itself simultaneously: beside, beyond, resembling, altered, contrary, abnormal, protection against, and subsidiary, and retains its hyphenation in order to present this meaning each time it is written.  

At the outset of this chapter, I proposed that we examine some of the subject’s possible orientations in order to leave sufficient room for the movement of alternative understandings and (dis)locations of the subject in our attempt to think some more about what the subject of post-foundational politics might look like. Throughout this chapter, I have continued to mine the those places where subjects are not ‘supposed’ (to be found), those places that are said to be ‘outside’ of the political realm, yet we now know are also constitutive of it. What I have not yet done is address Nancy’s original question directly, which I will attempt to do here. So, who comes after the subject? The notion of ‘post-subjectivity’ has gained a lot of traction in various theoretical circles in recent years. The figure of a ‘post-subject’ suggests a transcendence of subjectivity in both the philosophical and historical senses, and is usually closely tied to discourses of ‘posthumanism.’ There are certainly various aspects of posthumanist thought that are compatible with my analysis,

643 For further reading on ‘posthumanism,’ see for example N. Katherine Hayles, How We Became Posthuman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Robert Pepperell, The Posthuman Condition (Bristol, UK: Intellect Books, 2009); Cary Wolfe, What is Posthumanism? (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009). See also Donna Haraway, Gilles Deleuze, Irving Goh, Manuel DeLanda.
namely that it incorporates a deconstruction of identity and an ontology of becoming rather than one of fixed being.\textsuperscript{644} Yet as even someone completely unfamiliar with posthumanism could guess, the notion of radically problematizing the category of the human entails, for the majority of posthumanist thinkers, leaving the category of the subject far behind.\textsuperscript{645} I believe that I have demonstrated, however, that I do not think we are ready to cut all ties to a subject just yet. Furthermore, thinking the subject as part of a progression – even if it is something we leave behind as part of this progression – is potentially dangerous: it naturalizes the subject, assigning to it a character of inevitability, both in terms of its appearance and its retreat. Yet just as ‘posthumanism’ does not equal ‘anti-humanism,’ the notion of a ‘post-subject’ is not necessarily an ‘anti-subject.’ A ‘post-subjective turn’ in politics or philosophy therefore might not necessarily signify an era devoid of subjectivity after all, but potentially an era in which the subject is figured as that which appears ‘after,’ ‘behind,’ or ‘subsequent to.’ Arguably, this is a shift that Badiou, Rancière, Nancy, Derrida, Butler and others have already seen taking place.

My question here becomes, how do we distinguish between the subject devoid of content and the para-subject, and why is this distinction important? Perhaps the way to approach this problem is to ask, is it possible for the subject to become an empty signifier, perhaps through the overdetermination of partial identities over a long period of time? In the chapter entitled “Why Do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics?” in \textit{Emancipation(s)}, Laclau lays out the conditions under which an empty signifier can emerge:


\textsuperscript{645} There are some posthumanist thinkers who call for a ‘return’ to the subject within a current posthuman context. See for example Rosi Braidotti, \textit{The Posthuman} (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).
An empty signifier can […] only emerge if there is a structural impossibility in signification as such, and only if this impossibility can signify itself as an interruption (subversion, distortion, etcetera) of the structure of the sign. That is, the limits of signification can only announce themselves as the impossibility of realizing what is within those limits – if the limits could be signified in a direct way, they would be internal to signification and, *ergo*, would not be limits at all.\(^\text{646}\)

Laclau’s argument, like that of Derrida in his work on aporias, is that an empty signifier is the product of the ‘exclusionary limit’ of a signifying system. Wherever a system operates as a totality, it implies a limit and thus an ‘outside.’ This limit is necessary to the process of signification, but it is also necessarily impossible to signify from within that system (because it does not properly ‘belong’ to that system). It is this tension between a defining limit and the impossibility of representing what it excludes that produces empty signifiers. Referencing his work with Mouffe in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Laclau cites the example of the ‘unity of the working class,’ which he argues has become an empty signifier as the result of the “overdetermination of partial struggles over a long period of time.”\(^\text{647}\) On a broader scale, I believe that a similar argument can be made about the fate of the ‘unity of emancipatory struggles.’

Regarding the subject itself, it is not difficult to transpose Laclau’s thinking here: in the traditional understanding of a self-present, unified subject, this subject is figured as a closed totality, distinct from others and worldly objects, which therefore constitute its limits. These limits are necessary in order for this subject to be constituted in that way, yet it is impossible to signify those limits from within that closed system because they do not


\(^{647}\) Ibid., 40.
properly belong to it. Thus, this kind of subjectivation is grounded in an impossible identification. In keeping with the spirit of critique of this project, we once again locate the seeds of possibility here in impossibility, namely in the emergence of an empty signifier through the structural impossibility of signification that manifests itself as an interruption or subversion. Though these processes are by no means identical, I think it is also useful here to draw a connection between the operation of the empty signifier and the example of the Freudian slip, partly because they are at least structurally related, but also because of the prominence of speech in the work of all of the theorists I have evoked here.\(^6\)

More specifically, we can pose the further (political) question to which the Freudian slip becomes but one possible answer: how does one say what one cannot say? What kind of subject can be heard even without a voice? Finally, and perhaps most to the point: what kind of subject, devoid of the powers of representation, might nevertheless retain the power to present itself? My answer, to which I will return shortly, is ‘the interject.’ First, however, I will address the discourse(s) that gave rise to this notion.

I have been discussing subjectivity by talking about what it is defined against, yet as we have learned through the work of Derrida, Nancy and others, is that there can be no strict division between \textit{ergon} and \textit{parergon}. Looking back, this project has revolved around and been driven by those who have been excluded from our collective socio-political apprehension: \textit{homo sacer}, the stranger, the subaltern, the part with no part, the rogue, the inexistent, the dispossessed, the stateless, the victim. We live in an age of outcasts; the outcast is a figure of thought that interpellates everyone.\(^7\) Though I have tried to be careful not to totalize these figures, nor to define them solely through their invisibility, it is a

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\(^6\) For example, in the political thought of Rancière and Badiou, but also in Derrida’s critique of speech and Nancy’s work on enunciation, voice, and listening.

\(^7\) This is the premise of Irving Goh, \textit{The Reject: Community, Politics, and Religion After the Subject} (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).
challenge to try to adequately describe the shared sense of the play of void and surplus and
the possibility of a latent source of power/agency that has yet to be fully uncovered in these
dark corners of the social realm. If we reorient our thinking to begin to understand these
gures as para-subjects, we open the possibility of a subject that exceeds its own ends,
paradoxically leaving its subjectivity behind in order to open itself to other modes of
subjectivation. In extreme circumstances, the para-subject might use this power to stand
against subjectivation, while in more moderate forms and under certain circumstances, it
resists domination by *embracing* certain forms of subjectivation.

Irving Goh, for example, proposes a radical alternative to the subject: the *auto-reject.*
Returning to one of the theses of this project in searching for an alternative to identity
politics, Goh’s *The Reject* develops a theory of ‘the reject’ in opposition to ‘the subject,’
which he argues is “a more adequate figure of thought to the question of others and
differences, especially in affirming others without acculturating their differences.” Where
Butler could be said to advocate a certain level of acceptance of precariousness, the auto-
reject is a figure of refusal that removes itself entirely from the equation of domination.
Undoubtedly a Deleuzian himself, Goh draws much of his theory of auto-rejection from
Deleuze’s work, and one piece in particular is illustrative of Goh’s central figure of thought.
In “Bartleby; Or, the Formula,” Deleuze examines the effects produced by Bartleby’s habit
of repeatedly refusing particular tasks with the phrase, “I would prefer not to.” The
philosophical significance of this statement is that it is neither a refusal nor an acceptance,
but rather the postulation of an impossibility. Deleuze explains:

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651 Gilles Deleuze, “Bartleby; Or, The Formula” in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and
Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 68-90.
The formula is devastating because it eliminates the preferable just as mercilessly as any nonpreferred. It not only abolishes the term it refers to, and that it rejects, but also abolishes the other term it seemed to preserve, and that becomes impossible. In fact, it renders them indistinct: it hollows out an ever expanding zone of indiscernibility or indetermination between some nonpreferred activities and a preferable activity. All particularity, all reference is abolished. […]. He can survive only by whirling in a suspense that keeps everyone at a distance.\textsuperscript{652}

Since “I would prefer not to” neither flatly refuses nor accepts the proposed task, its repetition has the effect of placing Bartleby in a state of suspension where he is insulated against both complicity within a particular social determination and the possible re-determination of his social position (for example, moving from employed to unemployed). Bartleby is therefore neither what Goh would refer to as an ‘active’ reject (he is not rejecting others) nor a ‘passive’ reject (he is not rejected by others). He is instead more closely tied to the auto-reject: he abandons being to existence, but only to a certain extent.

Similar to Deleuze’s notion of ‘becoming imperceptible,’ Goh’s auto-reject is not an abjection or self-annihilation.\textsuperscript{653} Goh explains that auto-rejection instead involves “giving up all that one has prepared and gathered for oneself, and giving up the position on which one has begun to ground or found oneself with all that one has gathered: that is what the subject is unable or reluctant to do.”\textsuperscript{654} The auto-reject is always ungrounded and unidentifiable; it has no position, attributes or defining principles. It remains wholly open to everything.

\textsuperscript{652} Ibid., 71.
\textsuperscript{653} In comparison, Deleuze’s notion of becoming imperceptible describes a process whereby one rids oneself of every classification, every identification. He writes: “To become imperceptible oneself […] To have dismantled one’s self in order finally to be alone and meet the true double at the other end of the line. […] To become like everybody else; but this, precisely, is a becoming only for one who knows how to be nobody, to no longer be anybody. To paint oneself gray on gray.” Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, \textit{A Thousand Plateaus}, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 197.
\textsuperscript{654} Goh, \textit{The Reject}, 232.
abandoning its own being. For my purposes here, however, the auto-reject is understandably difficult to engage. It renounces everything but life itself. Though there is certainly an ethical force working through this figure, it manages to sidestep any and all politics that employs any notion of subjectivation entirely. Indeed, that is the point; but it is difficult to move on from there. Perhaps this is the theoretical ‘next step’ if the questions about subjectivity and politics with which we are grappling today are either resolved or deemed unresolvable once and for all. But that is a big ‘if.’

Goh’s trajectory is a move toward ‘post-human futures,’ and while my project does not engage post-humanism as one of its central theoretical objects, his theory of the reject in all three of its turns is nevertheless intimately bound up with the themes I have taken up here. Perhaps the most relevant notion that ties all of this together is the idea that political life should no longer be understood only in those terms of accumulation and agreement which have, until recently, characterized most thinking on the subject and on politics. I have focused instead on thinkers who view it as a process of subtraction – or, to borrow a term from Esposito, of subtractionem, ‘a drawing back’ – the interplay of lack and supplement, of sharing and separation, retreating and returning, or of “touching and withdrawing,” in Goh’s words.655 I have proposed, however, that another figure might be more useful, conceived along the same etymological lines but perhaps more user-friendly within the theoretical framework I have set up here: the interject. Rather than being ‘thrown under’ an external authority like the subject, and less extreme than the reject which ‘throws back’ all ties to anything except bare existence, the interject disrupts: it inserts itself into a situation and interrupts the flow, challenging through its mere appearance the claims to consistency, coherence, unity and/or harmony within any given situation. The interject inserts itself

655 Ibid., 232.
somewhere *between* the extremes of the autonomous, unified rational subject and the auto-reject, refusing identification in any traditional sense yet nevertheless formally exercising its agency in the act of interruption. Even Bartleby, no matter how radical his resistance, begins his statement with an “I,” thus paradoxically subjectivating himself even while he resists his subjection by others. Bartleby, I argue, is not an auto-reject: he is an anarchist, albeit perhaps an unwitting one. Moreover, I argue that by repeatedly expressing his preferences to his superiors, he is acting on the presupposition of equality. Perhaps if we modify his response slightly, we have a slogan for the post-foundational political subject: “we would prefer not to.”

In “Jacques Rancière and the Ethics of Equality,” Todd May argues that anarchism is still largely misunderstood. The difference between Marxism and anarchism, for example, should not be thought as “the argument between those who would lay the blame for oppression at the feet of the economy and those who instead would lay it at the feet of the state. […] What anarchism criticizes is not power, strictly speaking, but domination.”

Domination takes many forms. The most obvious examples might be the domination of a ruler over his or her subjects or a boss over a worker, yet there are also more subtle forms of domination that lack ‘intentional’ dominators. Ultimately, May agrees with thinkers such as Mikhail Bakunin who argue that the state is not the source of all domination, but rather one of its more noteworthy instigators. May concedes that anarchism can be defined as a political position that works to critique and eradicate domination, but importantly, he argues that this is not *all* there is to it. On one hand, defining anarchism negatively (in terms of what

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657 May points to Foucault’s work in *Discipline and Punish* and the first volume of the *History of Sexuality* as examples of this phenomenon.
it is against) is appropriate, given that any kind of proposed solution to which others then must adhere merely becomes a new form of domination. What May seeks, on the other hand, is a more positive understanding of what anarchism is that does not fall prey to the cycle of domination that it seeks to oppose.

This way of thinking resistance through its potential effects is reminiscent of a passage in Butler’s *Frames of War* where she writes, “Certainly I want to be able to kiss in public – don’t get me wrong, but do I want to insist that everyone must watch and approve of kissing in public before they can acquire rights of citizenship? I think not.” Both thinkers are advocating against the creation of a new binding set of norms, even if those new norms are born out of resistance. There is an important lesson to be remembered here, one with which readers of Rancière are familiar: politics does not eradicate domination. Politics works to narrow the gap between those who have a part and those who do not, but this suspension is always temporary. The political subject interjects, then withdraws. Prior to political action, individuals exist in accordance with the classifications bestowed upon them within the social order. May explains that “to engage in the presupposition of equality is at once to reject one’s classifications – politics declassifies – and to create oneself as a subject: an actor with no name other than that of being equal.”

This political subject is also, therefore, in a certain sense an ‘unwitting anarchist’: an anarchist by definition, since political subjectivation is, for both Rancière and Badiou, the ultimate act of resisting domination and fostering political solidarity, but perhaps ‘unwitting’ because this is not a deliberate identification but the resistance to it. This subject’s resistance is at times unintentional, its appearance unexpected. It resists through declassification, and

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659 Butler, *Frames of War*, 107-108. This is a reference to her discussion of the establishment of a cultural grounding for immigration (in this case based on challenges to heteronormativity), using Holland and France as contrasting examples.

660 Ibid., 31. My emphasis.
thus it is no one and everyone. This interject, the para-subject, taken as a political name, describes a subject beyond itself, beside itself, contrary to itself: it is the subject position created through an impossible identification. It is a subject that is capable of declassification and can lead to a redistribution of the sensible. It works against the claim that there is no part for the outcast, because the interject is supplemental to every ‘essence’ or totality it interrupts. It could be said to represent an immune response to community, in that it ‘throws’ ‘togetherness,’ not completely away, but certainly off. The ‘position’ of the *interject* is *imposition*: a position between inside and outside, between singularity and collectivity, interrupting and disrupting, always arriving and retreating unexpectedly.

If the interject can be said to have a ‘proper place,’ that place would be the *non-lieu*, the non-place. In Nancy’s description:

> This is not a place and yet it is not outside of all place. It forms within the place, within the extension of a face, the gaping [*béance*] of a non-place [*non-lieu*]. In this nonplace, the figure (extension, measure) and the without-figure (thought without measure) are joined and distinguished, joined by their distinction. The place of enunciation [*de l’énoncer*] is formed by the internal dis-location of this reunion.661

In this text, Nancy is describing the gaping of a mouth, an opening into the body that is nevertheless not of the body, or a part of the body (the open mouth) which is not actually a ‘part.’ If we can extend this analysis into a social metaphor, the ‘part with no part,’ the inexistent, lies dormant until the event – like the opening of a mouth – reveals its existence, which radically changes the contours of that field.

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The interject establishes an inoperative teleology that is perpetually ‘unworking’ the closure of discourses of history, politics, and progress, including the ‘end of history.’ In “Béance,” Peggy Kamuf describes it in its juridical sense as that which delays, dissolves, or withdraws a case without it going to trial, arguing therefore that it is a “judgment that announces or enunciates that there will be no judgment as to guilt or innocence, a finding that there is no place to judge. It therefore renders justice by refusing to render it under the law, which it does when it pronounces or enunciates the non-lieu.”662 In a certain sense, the interject cannot merely be located in the non-lieu, it functions as a non-lieu in this juridical understanding as that which delays, dissolves or withdraws the possibility of conventional ‘end,’ rendering this incompleteness an end in itself. Turning back to history, then, the site of the interruption must not simply swoop in at the ‘end,’ but rather erupt in the gap between continuity and discontinuity itself, a ‘pure’ nonplace.663 Similarly, in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” Foucault argues against the practice of studying history as ‘descent’ and ‘emergence’:

As descent qualifies the strength or weakness of an instinct and its inscription on a body, emergence designates a place of confrontation but not as a closed field offering the spectacle of a struggle among equals. Rather, it is a “nonplace,” a pure distance, which indicates that the adversaries do not belong to a common space. Consequently, no one is responsible for an emergence; no one can glory in it, since it always occurs in the interstice.664

The interruption emerges out of the intervening space between the event and the site of its emergence, and thus both are inscribed into a new historical narrative. This understanding of history is similar to Rancière’s, which, as Kristin Ross observes, he grants the same power as fiction: “that of reframing, and thus expanding, perception, reconfiguring what is thinkable, scrambling perception management.”

In having forayed into the work of Rancière, Badiou, Nancy, and Derrida, among others looking for the seeds of a ‘post-identity politics,’ it is not surprising that I have found allies in somewhat unconventional places. Though the vast majority of my arguments have been constructed within the fields of deconstruction and post-foundationalism, certain ‘other’ discourses have been lurking throughout, threatening to widen the scope of this project well beyond its predetermined limits. To be clear, I see these other discourses as complementing rather than supplanting the central arguments. Two in particular stand out to me, and are worth mentioning again here. First, the project of posthumanism is closely related in terms of proposing this search for a politics emerging ‘after’ or ‘beyond’ identity. Although I am not dealing directly with the effects of technoculture and/or biotechnology, there is no doubt that some of the thinkers engaged here, most notably Esposito and Foucault in their respective work on biopolitics, are an important part of that conversation. Further, the idea that rethinking the role and constitution of human identity, as well as its non-human ‘others’ – both actual non-human entities as well as those who have been symbolically stripped of their

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humanity and thus radically excluded – is a key component of understanding contemporary politics has been heavily implied throughout this project, and one which Nancy and Derrida have both addressed in their own work.

The second ‘other’ discourse that has made its way into this analysis is the relatively less well-known ‘post-anarchism.’ Much of Todd May’s work is focused on an anarchist reading of Rancière, but other thinkers such as Saul Newman argue that rather than being focused on only two subjects (class and state), our focus ought to be on collective, localized, and diverse forms of resistance, as well as a much more radical understanding of subjectivity. Once again, we see a call to locate the subject beyond any singular identity or collection of identities. Perhaps most importantly here, however, the very question posed in the title Who Comes After the Subject? is asking specifically about the endurance of the subject after or beyond humanism, which is also an inherently anarchic question. For example, Lewis Call takes this question up in his own work, fostering a radical ‘anarchism of becoming’ through his reading of Nietzsche and his rejection of the Cartesian subject. Part of this becoming, again, is an understanding of the subject that contains an inoperative teleology, as well as a necessary troubling of space in terms of ‘inside’ and ‘outside.’ For example, Newman argues that postanarchism “conceives of a political space [and temporality] which is indeterminate, contingent and heterogeneous – a space whose lines and contours are undecidable and therefore contestable.”

669 Lewis Call, Postmodern Anarchism (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002), 31. I would like to note here that other ‘anti-identarian’ models of political thought – beyond postanarchism, posthumanism, and postfoundationalism – also privilege ‘becoming’ over ‘being,’ such as new materialism (Elizabeth Grosz, Manuel DeLanda, Karen Barad) and neovitalism (Henri Bergson, Eduard Hartmann).
engage, with us, in the search for subjectivity beyond our traditional understandings in order to locate new forms and possibilities for political agency.

Nancy’s purpose in *Who Comes After the Subject?*, with which I align my own, is neither the ‘obliteration’ of the subject, nor is it a ‘nihilism.’ Instead, it is a critique aimed at delivering “an entirely different thought: that of the one and that of the some one, of the singular existant that the subject announces, promises, and at the same time conceals.” In asking what ‘comes after it,’ this subject is truly ‘haunted’: both in the literal sense of being pursued or succeeded, and in the Derridian sense of the incoherent spaces and temporalities of a hauntology, that promises, threatens, announces or defers that which is beyond this subject. Paradoxically, the excluded part, through its mere existence, therefore acts upon the same subject whose existence is the source of and depends upon that exclusion. This notion is echoed perfectly in the Introduction to Simon Critchley and Peter Dews’ *Deconstructive Subjectivities*: 

[...] when the full range of what has been thought under the concept of the ‘subject’ comes into view, and when the possibilities of genuine alternatives are assessed, then the subject may appear, in many of its guises, to be one of the driving forces behind – rather than the prime defense against – that unraveling of metaphysics which has come to be known, after Derrida, as ‘deconstruction.’ Might it not be the case that the subject appears, disruptive and uncontainable, at the very point of breakdown of the foundational project of philosophical thinking?

In this project, I have argued that the subject that appears, ‘disruptive and uncontainable,’ through a post-foundational reading of politics is the interject, which I argue is the kind of

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672 Ibid., 4.
political subject we uncover in the work of Rancière, for example. But I have also hinted at
the notion that the interject cannot be strictly limited to this position. Its singularity lies in its
radical openness, as a condition (of instability) determined through the extensiveness of
discourses of closure, totality, and end, rather than a particular position within those
discourses.

As the lines between inside and outside, counted and uncounted, existent and
inexistent continue to be problematized and radically contested, so do our understandings of
which and what kind of identities matter most to politics. Although the 21st century has thus
far been defined by massive shifts in the ways in which we inter-act – for example, the
proliferation of technologically mediated interactions and experiences, a focus on the
formation and self-transformation of the subject (an ‘aesthetics of existence’ perhaps), and a
renewed focus on the bodily dimension of political subjectivity – it would be naïve and
perhaps even dangerous to announce the ‘end of identity politics,’ as if we had somehow
managed to transcend identity as a defining feature of experience. Instead, what we are
continuing to witness is the slow turning away from the notion of subjectivity as grounded in
individual identity toward the idea that there might be a strong connection between
anonymity and solidarity through the notion of the collective subject. Whatever problems or
challenges we find within identity politics, however, demands for self-determination,
questions of power and legitimacy, resistance to domination, and the search for new spaces
for resistance and alternative subject positions remain. If we side with Deleuze in thinking
that the purpose of contemporary critical political thought is realized in “contributing to the
invention of a people,” then we must shift our attention away from the repeated re-inscription
and representation of one that already exists.674

674 Deleuze, Cinema 2, 217.
In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida writes:

Many young people today [...] probably no longer sufficiently realize it: the eschatological themes of the ‘end of history’, of the ‘end of Marxism’, of ‘the end of philosophy’, of the ‘ends of man’, of the ‘last man’ and so forth were, in the ‘50s [...] our daily bread. We had this bread of apocalypse in our mouths naturally, already, just as naturally as that which I nicknamed after the fact, in 1980, the ‘apocalyptic tone in philosophy.’

Naturally, there is a double meaning to be uncovered in this passage. First, Derrida references the tone of judgment, death, catastrophe, and the actual ‘end’ of something that is associated with religious apocalypse and that is certainly evoked in each of these themes and from which each draws its rhetorical impact. Second, looking to the etymology of the word *apocalypse* in Ancient Greek, its meaning is simply ‘an uncovering,’ a revelation, or the disclosure of knowledge. In this sense, philosophy itself could be said to be a form of apocalypse, or at least its harbinger. The ‘we’ to which Derrida refers here is the group whose work we now credit with the creation of postmodern and poststructural approaches to philosophy. We must be careful, however, not to read this ‘post-’ as announcing an end, for example, the ‘end of structuralism,’ but rather as revealing something about structuralism that cannot be contained within that discourse. In a sense, I would even argue those ‘endisms’ mentioned by Derrida and discussed at the outset of this project are actually *post-apocalyptic*: on one hand, the intent behind this kind of discourse is to create the illusion that we have exhausted all possible knowledge and alternatives and thus achieved a kind of transcendence; yet on the other hand, to those who are looking, these endisms actually end up revealing what they cannot contain, namely the surfeit of philosophical and political

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antagonisms that simply cannot be contained within any kind of consensus, which are themselves the very sites of resistance to its closure.
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