



The Tomb of
Perseverance:
On Antigone

Greek tragedy is the term we commonly use to refer to it, but it would be more accurate to say *Attic* or *Athenian tragedy*, since it was only in the city-state of Athens that this aesthetic form was nourished and thrived. Yet not even this correction sufficiently discloses the intimate relation that bound this particular city to this particular form, for tragedy was not simply founded in Athens (between 534 and 530 B.C.) and there declared dead (by Aristotle, in 414 B.C.), it also helped invent the very city that invented it.¹ As Jean-Pierre Vernant has argued:

[Athenian] tragedy is contemporary with the City [Athens] and with its legal system. . . . [W]hat tragedy is talking about is itself and the problems of law it is encountering. What is talking and what is talked about is the audience on the benches, but first of all it is the City . . . which puts itself on the stage and plays itself. . . . Not only does the tragedy enact itself on stage . . . it enacts its own problematics. It puts in question its own internal contradictions, revealing . . . that the true subject matter of tragedy is social thought . . . in the very process of elaboration.²

That is, not only did the Athenians insert themselves into their tragic dramas—as Chorus members, who judged the actions of the protagonists in the same way as the tribunal of citizens in the audience was judging the unfolding tragedy against others performed for the same contest—they also posed, through their tragedies, the juridical and ethical questions they were currently confronting in actuality.

But if the form of Athenian tragedy is so local, tied not only to a specific place, a particular and precisely datable time, and a unique set of social problems, it would seem, then, according to the historicist-relativist thinking of our day, to offer nothing that might help us think through the juridical and ethical issues raised by the modern city. In fact, to begin a consideration of contemporary urban issues with a reference to Athenian tragedy is automatically to brand oneself

with the sin of anachronism. I propose, however, that the question should not always be “How can we rid ourselves of anachronism?”—for it is sometimes more relevant to ask “What is the significance of anachronism?” How can we account for the temporal nomadism of figures from the past? And, in this context, how is it possible that the drama of *Antigone* still concerns us? ³

The simplest initial response would be to point out that German Idealism *resurrected* *Antigone* at the beginning of our own era and refashioned her as the paradigmatic figure of *modern* ethics. Hegel, Schelling, Hölderlin all wrote with deep fascination about this young Athenian woman, and it is their fascination that commands contemporary interest in her.⁴ Voicing, undoubtedly, the sentiments of his colleagues in addition to his own, Hegel proclaimed *Antigone* “one of the most sublime, and in every respect most consummate works of human effort ever brought forth.”⁵ Despite this transhistorical judgment, however, before the intervention of German Idealism, the play had not received any special attention and had, in fact, been relatively neglected. It was only after paeans such as Hegel’s began to revive the play that it became a major reference point of ethical speculation, including that of Kierkegaard, Brecht, Anouilh, Irigaray, Derrida, and, of course, Lacan. In 1978 *Germany in Autumn*, a compilation film produced by nine New German Cinema directors, was released. Focusing on questions of a family’s right to bury its dead and the right of citizens to rebel against their government, the film loosely associated actions taken by the Red Army Faction and the Baader-Meinhof terrorists against the German state with *Antigone* and Polynices’ rebellion against Creon and the city-state of Thebes. More recently, Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet’s 1992 release of their film version of Brecht’s adaptation of Hölderlin’s translation of Sophocles’ *Antigone* has demonstrated that the legacy of German Idealism’s retrieval of *Antigone* lives on. If our interest in her is an archaism, then it is a peculiarly modern one. What will concern me in the following analysis is less the historical conditions that reawakened interest in *Antigone* (the Hellenistic bent of German Idealism has been amply explored) than the play’s own susceptibility to a rereading in the modern context (how is it possible to resurrect such an old drama?); for this issue is closely linked to the ethical issues raised in the play.

My approach to these issues begins with a single rereading of *Antigone*, or, more accurately, a rereading of a prior rereading: Lacan, in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, reinterprets Sophocles’ play by challenging Hegel’s interpretation in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Although later, in the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel would read the play

straightforwardly as a modern drama of ethical action, in the *Phenomenology* he reads it as a tragedy belonging to an earlier moment that he describes (perhaps metaphorically) as that of the Greek city-state; at this moment the opposition between the universal and the particular, the state and the family, human and divine law, man and woman could not be practically overcome. Hegel argues that classical Greek society held the two poles of these oppositions together, in a precarious equilibrium, through *custom*, which provided the community with a concrete unity. But when any decisive action was taken, this equilibrium collapsed into real and irresolvable conflict. Through the ethical *act*, the ethical *community* was dissolved, for the act “initiates the division of itself into itself as the active principle and into the reality over against it, a reality which, for it, is negative. By the deed, therefore, it becomes guilt. . . . And the guilt also acquires the meaning of *crime*, for as simple, ethical consciousness, it has turned towards one law, but turned its back on the other and violates the latter by its deed.”⁶ Only *inaction*, then, can remain innocent in the Greek polis; every *act*, insofar as it decisively chooses one pole of the opposition, one law, over the other, renders the actor guilty. This inevitable and tragic result is, according to Hegel, the very point of these dramas in general and of *Antigone* in particular, for there each protagonist, each ethical consciousness “sees right only on one side and wrong on the other, that consciousness which belongs to the divine law sees in the other side only the violence of human caprice, while that which holds to human law sees in the other only the self-will and disobedience of the individual who insists on being his own authority” (para. 466).

Hegel here effectively argues that Antigone (“that consciousness which belongs to the divine law”) and Creon (“that which holds to human law”) are, in their very decisiveness and intransigence, *both* guilty, both in the wrong, insofar as they both abandon or alienate one principle through the very act of embracing its opposite. Acting on behalf of a particular individual, her brother, Antigone betrays the community and terrorizes the state, while Creon acts on behalf of the city-state and thus sacrifices Polynices and the values of the family.

Lacan attacks the deep undecidability of this reading in order decisively to side with Antigone, praising hers as the only real, ethical act in the play and condemning the actions of Creon as crimes. In this reading it is *only* Creon who, through his actions, renders himself guilty. This is not to say that Antigone’s implacability goes unnoticed by Lacan; he is as strict as Hegel is in observing the raw, untamed, and uncompromising nature of Oedipus’s daughter’s rebellion. “The

nature of the girl is savage, like her father's, and she does not know how to bend before her troubles," is what the Chorus says of her, and Lacan is quick to agree.⁷ But as a psychoanalyst—and here we catch a glimpse of the difference between psychoanalysis and philosophy or psychology—he does not read the *behavior* of each of the protagonists, he defines the *structure* through which their acts must be read. Thus, although Antigone and Creon may be equally stubborn in the performance of their duties, this stubbornness, according to which fantasy structure it enters, admits of a fundamental distinction that Lacan will use to ruin the symmetry Hegel so carefully constructs.

In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud warns us not to conflate *Fixierarbeit*, which is an inexplicable fixation that persists despite every external attempt to dislodge it, with *Haftbarkeit*, "which is perhaps best translated by 'perseverance' but has a curious resonance in German, since it means also 'responsibility,' 'commitment'"⁸ It is this distinction introduced by Freud that lies behind and undergirds Lacan's insistence that Antigone, and she alone, is the heroine of Sophocles' play; her *perseverance* in carrying out the burial of her brother is ethically different from Creon's *fixation* on enforcing the statist prohibition against his burial.

How Freud is able to distinguish between these two kinds of act is what we will have to determine, but Lacan gives us a clue when he refers to them as separate effects of "the individual libidinal adventure" (SVII: 88). Whatever else needs to be said about the distinction, it is clear from this that it cannot be drawn without taking into account the *sexual* being of the subject who acts. The reason Hegel's reading has received so much feminist attention is precisely because it seems to be attentive to this issue insofar as it foregrounds the sexual difference that separates the play's main protagonists. But this difference turns out to be, in his reading, only a gender or biological difference, not a sexual one; that is, Antigone and Creon enact a division of labor that is defined sociologically, according to the spaces they are allowed to inhabit and the roles they are encouraged to assume, given their biology. In fact, Hegel consciously aims to *avoid* sex as far as possible, which is why he chooses to focus not on the husband/wife, but on the brother/sister relation. This relation, he says, provides a truer or "unmixed" picture of the difference between the sexes insofar as it excludes sexual desire. This positing of a family relation free of libido is problematic to begin with—both Freud and Foucault, in different and definitive ways, have exposed the family as a hotbed of desiring relations—but it is absolutely stupefying in light of the fact that the family in question here is Oedipus's and no stranger, then, to the taint of in-

cest. The Greek text, which loads Antigone's references to her brother with libidinal overtones, never lets us forget the fact that the tragedy that plays itself out before our eyes is in some sense a consequence of the incestuous union between Oedipus and his mother. It is necessary to conclude, then, that there is in this section of *The Phenomenology* no sex and no sexual difference, properly speaking. This has the effect of leaving the notions of work and act undisturbed or unproblematized by sexual enjoyment.

According to Freud, however, between sex or libidinal satisfaction and work there is a permanent antagonism that threatens work (or the act) with extinction. As he notes in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, "No other technique for the conduct of work attaches the individual so firmly to reality as laying emphasis on work . . . [which is] indispensable to the preservation and justification of existence in society. . . . And yet . . . work is not prized by men. They do not strive after it as they do after other possibilities of satisfaction."⁹ By rethinking the notion of work through that of pleasure, Freud opens Aristotle's distinction between the *act*, in all its rarity, and mere *action* to a redefinition in which what matters is the kind of relation each maintains toward sexual enjoyment. If the avowed ambition of the *Ethics* seminar is to remove the discussion of ethics from "the starry sky" and place it where it belongs, "in our bodies, and nowhere else," that is, if its ambition is to define an ethics of the *embodied* subject, then its crucial first step is to foreground the relation between work and the body as the site of pleasure, in order to distinguish the act of Antigone from the action of Creon on this ground.

Before embarking on an analysis of these relations, it will be useful to take a look at Hegel's reading from a different perspective, one that will eventually complicate the notion of pleasure. What makes Antigone and Creon equally guilty, in Hegel's eyes, is the fact that in choosing one course of action they thereby lose something that is not merely expendable, but that sustains, or is the necessary condition of, the very thing they choose. Antigone and Creon act on behalf of the particular and the universal, respectively, but since there is no particular without the universal, and vice versa, each choice ends in a betrayal of that in the name of which it is made. Thinking, of course, of Hegel, Lacan termed the either/or structure of such choices the "*vel* of alienation" and cited the mugger's offer, "Your money or your life," as illustration of its lose/lose possibilities.¹⁰ Once the choice is offered, you're done for—no matter which alternative you take. Between these terms, clearly the only real choice is life, but from the moment of your decision, yours will be a life severely limited by the loss of your wealth.

Now, it would seem that the revolutionary slogan, "Freedom or death," offers a choice with the same alienating structure. If you choose freedom and thereby invalidate the threat of death, you have no way of demonstrating your independence of the life situation, as Hegel argued in his essay on "Natural Law"; that is, you have no way of demonstrating that your choice is free. So, in this case the only real choice is death, since it alone proves that your choice has been freely made. Yet once this decision is taken, you lose all freedom but the freedom to die. This is what Hegel called the "freedom of the slave."

If you attend closely, however, you will notice that the second or *ethical* choice between freedom and death does *not* conform to the first. The description of the first choice as a mugging is meant to underscore what is at stake here; it suggests that this particular choice is a game played entirely in the Other's court. Stumbling into its preprogrammed scenario, you, its victim, might have been anyone at all, and you must react, if you are rational, in a purely formal way, by making an *analytical* judgment and surrendering your purse. Kant's moral law, "Act in such a way that the maxim of your action may be accepted as a universal maxim," would be sufficient to get you through this urban dilemma; it would prescribe the correct choice. But this only underscores the problem with this statement of the moral law: it still imagines a choice prescribed by law, however formal it may be, and reduces the notion of the *universal* to that of the *common* (SVII: 77). In this case, everyone must act in the same way, but *must* loses its ethical connotation, since it is now guided by, rather than independent of, external sanction.

In the second example, however, by choosing one does *not* automatically lose what is not chosen, but instead *wins* some of it. Lacan attributes the difference between the two examples to the appearance of death in the second. It is through the introduction of the "lethal factor," as he puts it, that the revolutionary choice opens the possibility of an act about which it is improper to say that it sacrifices freedom, that it loses it to the structure of alienation. The choice of death gains freedom. This point is utterly incomprehensible unless one assumes that the death one opts for in the second example is not the same one that is avoided in the first. That is, at the point at which death intersects freedom—which is to say, at the point at which it intersects the *subject*—it ceases to be conceivable in literal or biological terms. The authority for this observation is, again, Freud, who argued that death is for the subject only "an abstract concept, with a negative content."¹¹ For this reason it does not enter psychoanalysis as such, but only in the form of the death drive. We must assume, then, if we are speaking of the embodied rather

than the abstract subject, that what is at issue in the intersection of freedom and death is not biological death, but the death drive. It is to the latter that we owe the possibility of an ethical act that does not alienate freedom or incur additional guilt. More specifically, it is to *sublimation*, which is strictly aligned with the drive as such in Lacan's account, that we owe this possibility.

My argument, in sum, is that Lacan attacks Hegel's argument by (1) sexualizing work or, better, the act and (2) debiologizing death in an effort, in both cases, to corporealize the ethical subject. I understand that this appears to give rise to a contradiction: to declare ethical action, as such, a sublimation would seem to purify action of all reference to the body and pleasure. But this apparent contradiction arises from a common yet faulty definition of sublimation. If one were successfully to show that "sublimation is not, in fact, what the foolish crowd thinks . . . [it] doesn't necessarily make the sexual object disappear—far from it" (SVII: 161), then the contradiction would be dissolved.

■ IMMORTALITY IN THE MODERN AGE

Let us focus our attention, finally, on the act of Antigone. What precisely does she do? Hegel's version is the following: she buries her brother, Polynices, in order to elevate him to the status of "imperishable individuality"; she makes him "a member of the community which prevails over . . . the forces of particular material elements . . . which sought to . . . destroy him" (para. 452). This is Lacan's version: "Antigone chooses to be . . . the guardian of the criminal as such. . . . [B]ecause the community refuses to [bury Polynices, she] is required . . . to maintain that essential being which is the family *Até*, and and that is the theme or true axis on which the whole tragedy turns. Antigone perpetuates, eternalizes, immortalizes that *Até*" (SVII: 283). The two versions may appear to be roughly equivalent, but a striking difference (and one that will lead us to observe others) occurs in Lacan's introduction of a word that draws attention to a notion which not only Hegel but the entire modern period is loath to look at too directly or closely, a notion that has, since the Enlightenment, become more obscene even than death; this is the notion of immortality. What does it mean to "immortalize *Até*"? In modern times, it is not only the Greek word *até*, but also *immortalize* that strikes us as anachronistic.

Yet, although one might have expected the notion of immortality to perish completely, to become a casualty of the Enlightenment's secularization of reason and its dissolution of the links to its past, the truth turns out to be more

complex. For, while officially we moderns are committed to the notion of our own mortality, we nevertheless harbor the secret, inarticulable conviction that we are *not* mortal. Indeed, as Hans Blumenberg announces in his monumental book, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, not only does the idea of immortality not disappear, it is even “pushed forward by Lessing, Kant, and Herder to the point of the idea of reincarnation.”¹² And in his essay, “The Death of Immortality?” Claude Lefort similarly exposes the insistence of the notion of immortality within the modern period, remarking that “after the Bonapartist coup d’etat in the middle of the last century . . . the question of immortality [took on] . . . a political import. Astonishing as it may seem to us, in order to be a true republican, a true democrat, or a true socialist, one either had to deny or affirm a belief in immortality.”¹³ Blumenberg and Lefort both stress that this notion is not a simple hold-out from a superceded past, the survival in the present of an old religious idea; it is, rather, a new product of the break from our religious past. But though they concur generally on the need to differentiate the classical from the modern notion of immortality, they are at odds on the question of how the distinction should be made.

According to Lefort’s account, the classical notion named a kind of mortal ambition to participate in everlastingness through the accomplishment of great works or deeds, although the deed itself was not thought to have any chance of enduring, ultimately. Since every human effort was conceived as time-bound, none could hope to elevate itself above the temporal flux in order to install itself within the timeless realm of eternity. Thus, although the deed could win for its doer some measure of glory or *immortality*, it could not win *eternity*, which meant that it was worth relatively little. The modern notion of immortality benefits from the collapse of our belief in an eternal realm. Where formerly every deed (and the active life, in general) was thought to fail insofar as it was unable to elevate itself *out of time*, into eternity, in modernity the deed was reconceived as affording one the possibility of transcending historical time *within* time. This is what is new: this idea that the act could raise itself out of impotence, or out of the immanence of its historical conditions, without raising itself out of time. It is at this point that the act—or work in this specific sense—took on a value it could not have had in the classical era. The valorization of the act helped to forge, Lefort argues, a new link between immortality and “a sense of posterity” (L, 267). The great social revolutions at the end of the eighteenth century may have severed all ties with the past, but they did so, paradoxically, in order to establish a permanence in time, a durability of human deeds that was not possible previously. The difference arises be-

cause the “sense of posterity” now took place across a historical *break*; what was thus brought forth was “the idea of a conjunction between something that no longer exists and something that does not yet exist” (L, 270).

In the argument presented by Blumenberg, the notion of posterity is not linked to that of immortality, but instead opposes or replaces it. This argument is imbedded in a larger one, which states that the attainment of complete knowledge by any individual has in the modern age been rendered strictly inconceivable. Within modernity, knowledge is objectified through scientific *method*, which means that it ceases to be a matter of individual *intuition*; that is, methods of objectification transform the process of acquiring knowledge into one that extends infinitely beyond the cognitive compass, and even ambition, of any single enquirer. Along with this objectification, the sheer speed with which knowledge comes into being is superseded, and discarded as useless, threatens to turn the curious into functionaries of the process of knowledge and to render the possession of knowledge irredeemably fleeting and incomplete. For these reasons, no individual, only a generational series of them, can become the subject of modern knowledge.

It is in order to clinch this argument that Blumenberg introduces Ludwig Feuerbach’s notion of immortality into the discussion. According to Blumenberg’s summary, Feuerbach “extracted the anthropological core” hidden within our modern notion of immortality, to produce the following definition: “immortality extrapolated as the fulfillment of theory is the product of the difference . . . between the ‘knowledge drive,’ which relates to species man, and its unsatisfied actual state in the individual man” (B, 441)—as we will see, this will form the basis of Freud’s understanding of the superego. In other words, once the rapid and conspicuous progress of modern knowledge makes the individual’s limited share in this progress unbearable, the notion of immortality arises as a way of healing the wound between the species and the individual, of assuaging the structural dissatisfaction that emerges from their difference. A kind of error of prolepsis, immortality negates history in order to posit a *spatial* beyond where the future is already waiting to bestow itself on the individual. This error is *modern* because its anticipation of reward is based on the perception of the actual, temporal progress of man rather than on the presumed munificence of an eternal being; it is *mistaken* in that it unjustifiably converts some as-yet-unrealized temporal progress into a spatial paradise.

To correct this mystification, Feuerbach argues, man needs to *surrender* the notion of immortality and confront the finality of his own death. This will

allow man, unimpeded by otherworldly distractions, to concentrate his energies into the pursuit of his "knowledge drive [*Wissenstrieb*]," which is, for him, a *biologized* curiosity, through which "the interests of the species are imposed on the individual as an obligation, but through which at the same time the individual lays claim to a counterinterest" in his own happiness (B, 444). What this says, in brief, is that only the species is able to accomplish the destiny of man, and this destiny is man's happiness on earth. The knowledge drive—which Feuerbach also calls the "happiness drive"—aims at happiness by seeking to know not the answers to metaphysical questions, but only those truths that will help satisfy the material needs of man; it thus places man within the cooperative machinery of the human pursuit of knowledge without reducing him to a mere cog, since this machine is specifically designed for *his* earthly benefit, for the benefit of his mortal existence.

While these conclusions are Feuerbach's, one looks in vain in the discussions of Kant and Freud that precede and follow this one in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* for some word of dissent from Blumenberg. One encounters instead the dubious implication that there is a *continuity* among these thinkers on the notion of the knowledge drive. If anything, Feuerbach is shown slightly to improve on Kant, for the former not only takes over the latter's position—that there are certain suprasensible ideas which are unsuited to human reason, which we cannot and should not strive to know—he also removes the last vestiges of the spatial metaphor of limits still discernible in Kant. Feuerbach thus allows us to view reason's limits as purely temporal; he teaches us finally that man has no "supernatural knowledge drive" (B, 442). And though Freud's notion of a knowledge drive (*Wissentreib*) is presented as similar to Feuerbach's in many respects, we are warned that in the study of Leonardo da Vinci, Freud does not pay sufficient attention to "the historical conditions affecting [Leonardo's] individual biography" (B, 452).

The distortions this continuity thesis precipitates are considerable; I will cite only the most basic. Kant's solution does not, as Blumenberg alleges, wipe out the tension between self-knowledge and salvation, or the immanent and transcendent destinies of the subject; quite the reverse. In Kant, the suprasensible is not simply eliminated from the realm of knowledge and thought, as it is in Feuerbach; it is instead retained as the very condition of thought. That is: no thought *without* the suprasensible. As far as the criticism of Freud is concerned, that he does not dwell excessively on Leonardo's historical conditions is indication not of a weakness in his theory, but of its positive contribution. For Freud, the knowledge drive is bound up with the solution of sublimation, the problem

being to explain how thought manages to escape compulsion and inhibition, or to explain how it escapes being a mere symptom of its historical conditions.

So far I have argued that the difference between Lefort and Blumenberg (or Feuerbach, since on this matter no discernible distance separates the commentator from the author on whom he comments) hinges on the fact that Lefort links immortality and posterity while Blumenberg opposes them. But there is another crucial difference that affects their respective notions of posterity, which also turn out to be dissimilar. The conjunction of immortality with posterity, in Lefort, takes place through a notion of singularity, which is absent in Blumenberg.¹⁴ Here is Lefort's most concise statement: "The sense of immortality proves to be bound up with the conquest of a place *which cannot be taken*, which is invulnerable, because it is the place of someone . . . who, by accepting all that is most singular in his life, refuses to submit to the coordinates of space and time and who . . . for us . . . is not dead" (L, 279).

Someone dies and leaves behind his place, which outlives him and is unfillable by anyone else. This idea constructs a specific notion of the social, wherein it is conceived to consist not only of particular individuals and their relations to each other, but also as a relation to these unoccupiable places. The social is composed, then, not just of those things that will pass, but also of relations to empty places that will not. This gives society an existence, a durability, despite the rapid and relentless alterations modernity institutes. If, with the collapse of eternity, the modern world is not decimated by historical time, it is because this unoccupiable place, this sense of singularity, somehow knots it together in time. Singularity itself, that which appears most to disperse society, is here posited as essential rather than antagonistic to a certain modern social bond. Not only this, but another paradox seems to define this bond; singularity is described both as that which is "localized in space and time" (L, 270) and as *universal*, as that which refuses the coordinates of space and time, which is unsituatable within time. (Clearly, *singularity* is distinct from *particularity*, which is also localized, but which we commonly and rightly associate with things that fade with time and distance, with the ephemeral, things that do not endure.)

This notion of singularity, which is tied to the *act* of a subject, is defined as *modern* because it depends on the denigration of any notion of a prior or superior instance that might prescribe or guarantee the act. *Soul, eternity, absolute or patriarchal power*, all these notions have to be destroyed before an act can be viewed as unique and as capable of stamping itself with its own necessity. One calls *singular*

that which, "once it has come into being, bears the strange hallmark of something that *must be*," and therefore cannot die (L, 279). Significantly, this notion of singularity, which gives rise to our obscure, one might even say *unconscious* sense of immortality, is associated by Lefort with the writer, that is, with sublimation.¹⁵ For it is through the psychoanalytic concept of sublimation that we will be able to clarify exactly how singularity is able to figure and not be effaced by the social bond.

However incomplete the notion of sublimation remains at this point, it is nevertheless clear that it is *meant* to bridge the gap between singularity and sociality. So, the immediate question becomes: what allows Feuerbach to do without it? Or: what *blocks* the emergence of any sense of singularity or temporal immortality in his theory? Recall that Feuerbach entertained (and rightfully rejected) only a *spatial* concept of immortality; no temporal version of the notion (whereby one could conceivably transcend time *within* time) presented itself to him as it does to Lefort. Why not? What Feuerbach sets out to do is to eliminate every trace of transcendence by incarnating the notion of eternity in the finite and forward movement of time, that is: in progress. Yet, as we have already suggested, the elimination of eternity presents a unique problem for the modern age; it risks the dissolution of society in a temporal vat. Something has to endure, it would seem, for progress to be conceivable. In fact, Kant made this very argument: "[I]nfinite progress is possible . . . only under the presupposition of an infinitely enduring existence . . . of . . . rational being."¹⁶ But whereas he offered this argument in defense of the postulate of the immortality of the *soul*, commentators have pointed out that his argument actually requires, if it is to make any sense, an immortal *body*.¹⁷ Feuerbach tacitly acknowledges the problem, as well as the corporeal requirement for its solution, in his proposed notion of posterity as an infinite *succession* of bodies seeking happiness—which nicely avoids the seemingly self-contradictory notion of an immortal *individual* body.

The nub of this solution is sheer and continuous succession. None of the bodies by itself possesses or actualizes immortality in the way the body of the Monarch was thought to do during the *ancien régime*, for example. Succession alone allows the individual enquirer to be taken up and included within the whole without limits of humanity, and it alone saves society from the pulverization of time. This solution also soothes the structural dissatisfaction, the unbearable gap, between the individual, whose share of progress is minuscule, and posterity, which "possesses in abundance" the happiness the individual seeks. Finally, this

solution allows one to argue that the limits of human knowledge are merely temporal and thus capable of being gradually eliminated.

THE DEATH DRIVE: FREUD'S THESIS ON FEUERBACH

Feuerbach is right to want to snatch life back from eternity in order to insert it into historical time. The problem is, however, that for him, this insertion means that life is conceivable only in biological terms, that is, as *finite*, or as defined by its temporal limit, death. His description of the relation between the human individual and his or her posterity attempts to offer an alternative to Aristotle's description of an animal's relation to its species, which relation, Aristotle argues, renders the animal eternal, a part of ever-recurring life: "Nature guarantees to the species their being forever through recurrence [*periodos*], but cannot guarantee such being forever to the individual."¹⁸ But if his *biological definition of human life* nevertheless risks reducing the individual subject to its "animal dimension," this is because it shares too much not with Aristotle, but with a modern and problematic definition of life.

To which conception do we refer and why is it problematic? At the end of his essay, "Critique of Violence," Walter Benjamin isolates this conception when he mentions with disdain the familiar proposition that "higher even than the happiness and justice of existence stands existence itself." Judging this belief in the sacredness of life itself, that is, in the sacredness of "bodily life vulnerable to injury by [our] fellow men," to be "false and ignominious," he speculates that it is probably of recent origin, "the last mistaken attempt of the weakened Western tradition to seek the saint it has lost in cosmological impenetrability."¹⁹

In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Giorgio Agamben follows up on Benjamin's suggestion by tracking the emergence of this dogma, wherein *bare* life, or life itself denuded of any political form or "protective covering," is deemed sacred. Whereas in classical Greece, *bios* (a *form of life*, or way of living, defined within the political sphere) could be, and systematically was, distinguished from *zoe* (the simple *fact of life*, common to animals, men, and gods), in modern society, he argues, *bios* and *zoe* became conflated, making bare, biological life the very matter of modern politics. Agamben thus adopts Foucault's thesis that in the middle of the nineteenth century—or, at the "threshold of biological modernity"—natural life became the primary concern of the State and, as a result, politics was transformed into *biopolitics*. With the development of the "life sciences," the old "territorial

State” (in which power asserted itself through the possession and control of geographical territory) gave way to the “State of population” (in which power reigns less over land than over life itself): “the species and the individual as a simple living body become what is at stake in a society’s political strategies.”²⁰ It is against this backdrop that Feuerbach’s notion of the biologically based “happiness drive” must be understood; it is in this context that its political profile assumes its ominous shape.

If modern political power becomes coextensive or *conflated with*, as was said a moment ago, the life over which it assumes sovereignty, it does so paradoxically by declaring bare life to be *separable from* forms of life, that is, from the political sphere wherein the living individual is accorded certain rights and powers. That is to say, it is only by declaring a (permanent) state of emergency, triggered by the emergency bare life poses, that modern power is able to suspend its self-limiting laws and assume absolute power over that same denuded (or, now, politically vulnerable) life. But if bare life in this way becomes barely distinguishable from the political power that invents it as simultaneously excluded from its sphere and as the very territory over which it reigns, *Homo Sacer* remains more interested in exploring the strategies of power than the notion of bare life they construct. The book’s references to Foucault are therefore limited to *The History of Sexuality* and *Dits et écrits*, where the focus is primarily on these strategies, rather than on the emergence of the biological definition of human life or, as Foucault puts it, the conceptual “bestialization of man.” When Agamben faults Foucault, then, for failing to demonstrate how political techniques and technologies of the self (“by which processes of subjectivization bring the individual to bind himself to his own identity and consciousness and, at the same time, to an external power”)²¹ converge to produce that form of “involuntary servitude” which characterizes the modern subject, we recognize a need to know more about the biological definition of life if we are ever going to be able to explain how modern power is able to sink its roots so thoroughly—so *inexhaustibly*—into bare life. What is it about this definition of life that allows power to assume such an extensive, even capillary hold over it?

Though not a response to this question, *The Birth of the Clinic*, particularly the chapter “Open Up a Few Corpses,” in which Foucault fittingly characterizes biological modernism as a “mortalism,” might begin to provide an answer. Placing the French physiologist Bichat in the conceptual vanguard of this modernism, Foucault describes the former’s innovation thus:

[I]n trying to circumscribe the special character of the living phenomenon Bichat linked to its specificity the risk of . . . death—of the death which life, by definition, resists. Bichat relativized the concept of death, bringing it down from the absolute in which it appeared as an indivisible, decisive, irrecoverable event: he volatilized it, distributed it throughout life in the form of separate, partial, progressive deaths, deaths that are so slow in occurring that they extend even beyond death itself.²²

The “medical gaze” of which Foucault speaks throughout *The Birth of the Clinic*, the gaze, in Agamben’s terms, of sovereign power, is an eye that sees death everywhere immanent in life, sees everywhere this threat to life, and finds in this very ubiquity the excuse for its own insidious and equally ubiquitous control. To the exact extent that life becomes defined by death, is permeated by death, it becomes permeated by power.

To return to Benjamin’s formulation, from the nineteenth century on, “*bodily life*” is defined essentially as *that which is “vulnerable to injury,”* by processes of disease as well as by our fellow men. To measure the novelty of this notion, Benjamin asks his readers to reflect on the fact that this essential vulnerability, which we now choose to label *sacred*, bore in antiquity the mark of *guilt*, that is, it was a sign of abjection.²³ Human life has always been known to be vulnerable to disease and death, of course, but only in the nineteenth century did this vulnerability become sacralized, by the discourses of power, as its essential aspect. Agamben, however, departs from Foucault and Benjamin by seeing this notion of bare life not simply as a rupture with previous thought but as the culmination of a gradual solidification, throughout history, of the link between nude or bare life and sovereign power. Thus, when he declares, for example, that “*Not simple natural life, but life exposed to death (bare life or sacred life) is the originary political element,*” it is in the midst of a discussion of Roman law, which is in this sense not so different from that of the modern legal-juridical order.²⁴

“Politicizing Death,” the penultimate chapter of *Homo Sacer*, opens with a reference to a 1959 study of what two French neurophysiologists termed *coma dépassé* (overcoma), a degree of coma, or of death’s incursion into life, involving a much greater loss of vital functioning than that which had previously been allowed to pass for life. The argument of the chapter is that advances in life-support technology have led medical science to redefine death by pushing its limits beyond those set by earlier standards. And as the limits of death are extended, so too are

the reaches of sovereign power, which now begins to decide on the fate of a new class of citizens, the “neomorts,” or *faux vivants*, that is, the new “living dead,” over which power assumes a unique sort of control. What Agamben asks us to bear witness to is the fact that this recent extension of life beyond the cessation of its vital functions and the consequent increase of State power were enabled by the emergence of the life sciences in the nineteenth century wherein death was conceived not as an absolute and unique event, but as a multiple phenomenon, immanent in life, dispersed through time, and extending “beyond death itself.” Yet one of the most original aspects of Agamben’s argument, as hinted, is the linkage of the historical account with a metaphysical one. It is, in the end, a certain metaphysical tradition that Agamben wishes to indict for the high crimes of biopolitics (in his narrative, the Nazi concentration camp comes to replace the city as the paradigmatic sociopolitical unit of this politics) because, he argues: by the way in which it isolates its proper element—bare life—biopolitics reveals its fundamental collusion with the metaphysical tradition. That is to say, he views the positing of *bare life* as strictly equivalent to the positing of *pure Being* insofar as both issue as responses to the encounter with an “unthinkable limit” beyond which these elements are then supposed to dwell, “indeterminate and impenetrable.”²⁵ According to this analysis, a logic of exception has been in place *ab urbe condita*, positing a limit and a beyond to the order of political life; this logic eventually provided support for the notion and construction of the camps. Thus, while divisions may have flickered momentarily in the classical City, Antigone may once have rebelled against Creon, these divisions and that rebellion were always placed at risk by the logic of exception that nourished sovereign power. And now, “we no longer know anything of the classical distinction between *zoe* and *bios*, between private life and political existence, between man as a simple living being at home in the house and man’s political existence in the city.”²⁶ Moreover, the current models, by which the “social sciences, sociology, urban studies, and architecture . . . are trying to conceive and organize the public space of the world’s cities without any clear awareness that at their very center lies the same bare life . . . that defined the biopolitics of the great totalitarian states of the twentieth century,” are in danger of simply *perpetuating* this politics of bare, bodily—or bestial—life.²⁷

In fact, it is almost impossible to imagine—not only for the reader but, one suspects, for Agamben himself, whose final pronouncements are irredeemably bleak—a model that would *not* risk perpetuating this politics. Ironically, the persuasiveness of *Homo Sacer*’s analysis adds another hurdle to the already difficult

task of formulating an alternative. For, by focusing, however productively, on historical continuities, Agamben is led to downplay the rupture the nineteenth-century “life sciences” represented, and it is precisely the notion of rupture, of a thought or act that would be able to break from its immanent conditions, that is needed to restore power to life. The most insidious difficulty confronting us, however, is the fact that we ourselves remain dupes of the dogma that death is imbedded in life; that is, we remain victims of the theme of bodily finitude, or of bare life, that these sciences cultivate. Alain Badiou, in an interview in *Artforum*, makes this important point: “The real romantic heritage—which is still with us today—is the theme of finitude. The idea that an apprehension of the human condition occurs primordially in the understanding of its finitude maintains infinity at a distance that’s both evanescent and *sacred*. . . . That’s why I think the only really contemporary requirement for philosophy since Nietzsche is the *secularization of infinity*” (my emphasis).²⁸

Stated thus and affixed to Benjamin and Foucault’s disparaging analyses of the modern sanctification of bestial life, this statement strikes one as a long overdue correction of certain contemporary commonplaces. Yet its judgment will remain incomprehensible to cultural theorists who continue to misrecognize bodily finitude as the sobering fact that *confounds* our Romantic pretensions. For these theorists—for whom limits are almost always celebrated, insofar as they are supposed to restrict the expansionism of political modernism and its notions of universalism and will (this is only slightly a caricature)—the body is the limit, par excellence, that which puts an end to any claim to transcendence. What Badiou is here proposing, however, is that our idea of bodily finitude assumes a point of transcendence. Like Agamben, Badiou argues that death becomes immanentized in the body only on condition that we presuppose a beyond.

What is needed, in this case, is not an abandonment of current interest in the body, but a rethinking of it. This rethinking would not have to entail a radical reinvention, for, in truth, another notion of the body has already been proposed, precisely as a challenge to the one offered by the (bare) life sciences. The notion to which I refer is the one suggested by psychoanalysis, where the body is conceived not “biopolitically” as the seat of *death* but, rather, as the seat of *sex*. Contrary to what Foucault has claimed, the sexualization of the body by psychoanalysis does not participate in the regime of biopolitics; it opposes it. Borrowing Badiou’s phrase, one could put it this way: through its definition of the sexualized body, psychoanalysis provided the world with a secularized notion of

infinity. Or: the concept of an immortal individual body, which Kant could not quite bring himself to articulate, is finally thinkable in Freud.

Yet notoriously, Freud's conclusion, stated in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, that *the aim of life is death*—seems on its face to contradict my assertion. Limited to this statement alone, Freud's theory would appear to be in harmony with the bio-theory of his day, insofar as his theory places the death drive at the very core of life and its various ambitions. Not flinching from this conclusion, even buttressing it by arguing that for Freud there are no life drives, that *all* the drives are death drives, Lacan nevertheless calls into question that simplistic interpretation of the death drive which perceives it to be nothing more than an explanation for the fact that a subject often chooses death or unhappiness rather than her own well-being. Why do people commit suicide or act against their own interests? Because of the death drive. If this were all there were to it, the drive would not have met Freud's own standards for conceptual validity. Faced with the proliferation of drives invented to account for almost every definable activity ("the drive to collect," "the drive to shop," and so on), a querulous Freud insisted that a concept which did nothing more than assign a substantialized cause to a specific, known effect, without adding anything new to our knowledge, was empty and useless. Although one of the effects of the death drive may be the free choice of death, this is by no means the drive's only or even assured result.

The paradoxical Freudian claim that the death drive is a speculative concept designed to help explain why life aims at death, in fact, tells only half the story; the other half is revealed by a second paradox: the death drive achieves its satisfaction by *not* achieving its aim. Moreover, the *inhibition* that prevents the drive from achieving its aim is not understood within Freudian theory to be due to an extrinsic or exterior *obstacle*, but rather as part of the very *activity* of the drive itself. The full paradox of the death drive, then, is this: while the *aim* (*Ziel*) of the drive is death, the *proper and positive activity* of the drive is to inhibit the attainment of its aim; the drive, *as such*, is *zielgehemmt*, that is, it is inhibited as to its aim, or sublimated, "the satisfaction of the drive through the inhibition of its aim" being the very definition of sublimation. Contrary to the vulgar understanding of it, then, sublimation is not something that happens to the drive under special circumstances; it is the proper destiny of the drive. This alignment of the drive with sublimation clarifies a commonplace misconception about sublimation, namely, that it substitutes a more socially respectable or refined pleasure for a cruder, carnal one. Lacan summarizes his complex argument about the death drive by referring to it

several times in the *Ethics* seminar as a “creationist sublimation.” Significantly, in *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, in the midst of his discussion of the drive, Lacan quotes the following Heraclitean fragment, appropriating it for psychoanalysis: “To the bow (*Bíos*) is given the name of life (*Bíos*) and its work is death” (SXI:177). The Greek pun is emphasized in order to place the proper accent on life, as it were—specifically, on the form of life. Life may be joined here to death, but not, we will soon see, in the same way it is in biopolitics.

Historically situated at the very “threshold of biological modernity,” as a contemporary of Bichat and the rest, Hegel considered Antigone’s act from the point of death. Her deed, he argued, concerns not the living, but the dead, “the individual who, after a long succession of separate disconnected experiences, concentrates himself into a single completed shape, and has raised himself out of the unrest of the accidents of life into the calm of simple universality” (para. 452). That is, Antigone’s act may be considered ethical, in Hegel’s terms, inasmuch as it involves universal being rather than a particular aspect of it, and it concerns universal being inasmuch as it is undertaken on behalf of a dead and therefore completed being. A problem arises, however, because the universality, or completeness, brought by death is merely *abstract*: it is the product of a natural, biological process, not of a self-conscious subject. Antigone’s task, then, is to redeem her brother from this first, biological death and this abstract universality by consciously performing a “second death” through her act of *burial*. She must complete for her brother the reflexive circuit of self-conscious life that he, whose life has been finally shaped by death, can no longer accomplish himself. But what is she able to reflect back to him except his own particularity, his own corporeal finitude, now *consecrated* by her act, raised to the dignity of “universal individuality,” which can only mean here a communally recognized individuality? Polynices is by this forever entombed in his own “imperishable individuality,” his own imperishable finitude. In this way bare, bestial life has been dignified, rendered sacred.

For Hegel, the fault—the reason Antigone’s act is ultimately as compromised as Creon’s and results in the sacrifice of universality for the sake of particularity—lies with death. It sunders the journey out from the journey back, divides the circuit of self-reflexivity into mere biological or bodily life (a “mere existent,” in his vocabulary), represented by the *corpse* of Polynices, and a bodiless act, purged of desire; the body, divorced from the deed, appears, in Hegel’s discussion, only as dead. And the act is powerless to do anything more than enshrine corporeal finitude. In Lacan’s estimation, the fault lies with Hegel’s ceding too

much, at least at this point, to biological death—even if the whole of *The Phenomenology* is structured as a successive series of attempts to master bodily finitude and death, which has at this historical moment, according to Philippe Aries's massive study, been newly rendered obscene.²⁹

Lacan's interpretation turns on his recognition that the body is, rather, the site of a different obscenity, a jouissance that opens a new dimension of infinity, immortality. Thus will Lacan be led to describe Antigone's deed not as a bestowal of "imperishable individuality" on her brother, but as an "immortalization of the family *Até*." But what does this difference signify in regard to Antigone's relation to the dead, to her familial past, or to the city? And what does it signify, to return to the terms of an earlier discussion, in regard to the relation between the "individual organism," which may be looked at, as Freud put it, "as a transitory and perishable appendage to the quasi-immortal germ plasm bequeathed to him by his race," and the *species*?³⁰ Finally, how can our argument—that Lacan reconnects body and act, the very terms Hegel's analysis sunders—be reconciled with Freud's contention that sublimation pries the act, whether it be a physical act or the act of thinking, from the body's grip?

Let us begin at the most basic level: death, and only death, is the aim of every drive; this is the Freudian proposition. Where the aim of the sexual *instinct* (which is to be found only among animals) is sexual reproduction, the aim of the *drives* (which Freud sometimes calls the *libidinal drives*) is death.³¹ This means not only that there is *no original life instinct* directing the subject outward toward another of the species for purposes of copulation, but also that there is nothing directing her toward the outside world for reasons of simple curiosity, as Feuerbach believed, for example. There is no drive impelling the subject toward any sort of fusion with others, toward "vital association," which would allow "the community of [subjects to] survive even if individual [subjects] have to die"; a notion Freud dismisses as the "Eros of the poets and philosophers."³² Freud claims categorically that "there is unquestionably no universal instinct toward higher development"; we must, then, definitively reject the "benevolent illusion" that there is among men a drive toward perfection or progress (SE 18: 41; my emphasis). Drive pushes away from or against the stabilization of unities or the dumb progress of developments. But before thoughts of Schopenhauer's philosophy ("death is the 'true result and to that extent the purpose of life'") spring to mind and lead us astray, we must recall that the involuted death drives are described by Freud as working *against* the teleology

of a system such as Schopenhauer's and as working instead toward winning for the subject "what we can only regard as potential immortality" (SE 18: 40). How so?

Directed not outward toward the constituted world, but away from it, the death drive aims at the past, at a time *before* the subject found itself where it is now, imbedded in time and moving toward death. What, if anything, does this backward trajectory, this flight from the constituted world and biological death, discover? It will surprise many to learn that Freud does not answer this question negatively by designating the nothing of death or destruction as the actual terminal point of drive, but argues instead that drive discovers along its path something positive, certain "'necessary forms of thought' . . . that time does not change . . . in any way and [to which] the idea of time cannot be applied" (SE 18: 28). Freud rather surprisingly, but explicitly, quotes Kant in this passage. Why? Is it to bolster the philosopher's thesis regarding the conditions of the possibility of thought, which are not subject to temporal alteration or decay and cannot be absorbed within the temporality of thought itself? Not at all. Freud does conceive his notion of drive as an intervention in Kant's philosophy, but the drive does not lend credence to the "Kantian theorem that time and space are 'necessary forms of thought,'" not thinkable in themselves; rather, it significantly revises that theorem. As we shall see, the psychoanalytic theory of Freud replaces the transcendental forms with empty, nonobjectifiable objects, the objects of the drive.

The aim of the drive, we have already said it, is death—or, as Freud alternatively puts it: "the restoration of an earlier state of things," a state of inanimation or inertia (SE 18: 37). Now, this state exists, according to the theory, only as a retrospective illusion, never as an actual state; but its purely mythical status does not prevent it from having had a long history. Plato's *Timaeus*, for example, depicted centuries earlier a similar inanimate past when the Earth, created as a globe and containing all things, had no need of sense organs or, indeed, of organs of any kind: "[T]here would not have been any use of organs by the help of which he might receive his food or get rid of what he digested, since there was nothing that went from him or came into him, for there was nothing besides him."³³ Psychoanalysis rewrites this mythical state as the primordial mother-child dyad, which supposedly contained all things and every happiness and to which the subject strives throughout his life to return.

If this were the end of it (and, unfortunately, too many think it is), the death drive would be a pure will to destruction or a "will to nothingness," in

Nietzsche's sense of the term. For, since this original state is mythical, the search for it is vain, and the endless and unsatisfiable pursuit of it would result in the annihilation of heaven and earth; the death drive would always inevitably end in death, in suicide and devastation. But this error ignores two essential facts: (1) that there is no single, complete drive, only partial drives, and thus *no realizable will to destruction*; and (2) the second paradox of the drive, which states that the drive inhibits, as part of its very activity, the achievement of its aim. Some inherent obstacle—the *object* of the drive—simultaneously *brakes* the drive and *breaks it up*, curbs it, thus preventing it from reaching its aim, and divides it into partial drives. Rather than pursuing the Nothing of annihilating dissatisfaction, the now partial drives content themselves with these small nothings, these objects that satisfy them. Lacan gives to them the name *objects a*; they are, as it were, simulacra of the lost (maternal) object, or as Freud and Lacan both refer to it, of *das Ding*. *Object a* is, however, the general term, Lacan designates several specific objects: *gaze, voice, breast, phallus*. In other words, he gives them the names of bodily organs. Let us clarify why the objects are given these names and how they displace Kant's "necessary forms of thought."

The first thing to note is that Freud's analysis of the subjective constitution of knowledge of reality is concentrated on a genetic account of what takes place, whereas Kant's is more concentrated, at least in the first two *Critiques*, on a description of the conditions of thought.³⁴ It is in part due to his genetic orientation that the mother-child dyad is privileged in Freud from the beginning. In the 1895 *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, specifically in the section on "Remembering and Judging," this dyad makes an early appearance with the primordial mother appearing in the form of the *Nebenmensch* ("fellow human-being" in Strachey's translation). This *Nebenmensch* is described as "the first satisfying object," and the child's ability "to cognize" is said to depend on its relationship to her. There is from the start it seems a structural disturbance of this relation, which is here theorized by Freud as a splitting of the *Nebenmensch*/mother into "two components, of which one makes an impression by its constant structure and stays together as a *thing [als Ding]*, while the other can be *understood* by the activity of memory—that is, can be traced back to information from [the subject's] own body."³⁵ In his gloss of this text, Lacan designates the two components of the subject's experience of the *Nebenmensch* as (1) *das Ding*, that part which "remains together as a [*Fremde*, alien] thing" and thus, as Freud says, "evades being judged" (SE I:334); and (2) *Vorstellungen*, ideas or representations through which the *Nebenmensch* can be cognized or

remembered. The act of judgment falls then into two parts, as Freud will elaborate more extensively in his essay on "Negation," and the sense of reality is said to be constructed through the "specific action" of reexperiencing or refinding the first satisfaction with which the *Nebenmensch*/mother was synonymous. The various aspects of the mother, what she was like, will be captured by the *Vorstellungen*, the system of representations or signifiers that form the relatively stable and familiar world we share in common with our "fellow human-beings" or neighbors. But some aspects of the primordial mother cannot be translated into these representations, since they are, Freud says, "new and non-comparable" to any experience the child has of itself. A hole thus opens in the system of signifiers since those that would enable us to recall these new and noncomparable or singular aspects of the mother are simply unavailable, they simply do not exist. The *Ding*-component is this alien, untranslatable part of the *Nebenmensch*, which is thus forever lost to the subject and constitutes, as Lacan puts it, "a first outside" (S VII: 52).

Until this point it is possible to think simply that the maternal Thing is lost for want of a signifier, that is to say, that the fault lies with the signifiers. Representation fails, by its very nature, to capture the being of the Thing, which is thus inaccessible to the former. A Kantian analogy would thus suggest itself: the *Ding*-component of the *Nebenmensch* is to the *Vorstellungen*-component as the noumenal Thing-in-itself is to the idea we have of it, its phenomenal appearance. This would make the two components of the *Nebenmensch* a psychoanalytical endorsement of the philosophical separation of thinking and being: as we gain access to language and thus thought, we lose our access to that being which is the maternal Thing. Numerous passages from Freud's texts spring to mind in support of this thesis, including this famous one from *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*: "At a time at which the first beginnings of sexual satisfaction are still linked with the taking of nourishment, the sexual instinct has a sexual object outside the infant's own body in the shape of the mother's breast. It is only later that the instinct loses that object, just at the time, perhaps, when the child is able to form a total idea of the person to whom the organ that is giving him satisfaction belongs."³⁶ The child is able to form an idea of the mother through thought, but it is precisely thought that forces the child to forfeit its link to the mother.

The radicalization of Freud by Lacan constitutes a refusal to be seduced by this analogy. At the core of this matter of the unforgettable but forever lost Thing, we find not just an *impossibility of thought*, but a *void of Being*. The problem is not simply that I cannot think the primordial mother, but that her loss opens up a

hole in being. Or, it is not that the mother escapes representation or thought, but that the jouissance that attached me to her has been lost and this loss depletes the whole of my being. But why continue to insist on the unforgettability of the Thing or lost jouissance? If we must not forget this jouissance that stays together as a whole, it must be because some trace of it remains behind even if the nature of that trace must be reconceived.

The point is this: Freud did not rest content with the division of the *Nebenmensch* into two parts. When there are only two components, as here, there is not yet any notion of drive. Drive emerges only with the introduction of another term that has far-reaching consequences for the way we perceive the *Nebenmensch* complex. The term is *Vorstellungrepräsentanz*, or “ideational representative” in Strachey’s translation. Lacan, attuned to the nuances of Freud’s thought, recognizes immediately the implications of this notion, which he defines in the following way: “*Vorstellungrepräsentanz* . . . is a matter of that which in the unconscious system represents, in the form of a sign, representation as a function of apprehending” (SVII: 71). Represents representation as a function of apprehending—what? Lacan answers this time, “the good that *das Ding* brings with it,” even though a page earlier he insisted that the primordial loss of *das Ding* entails a loss of that Sovereign Good which had once been the goal of classical ethics. There is no longer any Sovereign Good any more than there is a Being that “stays together as a thing,” as a “constant structure,” or as One. But, surprisingly, Lacan now informs us that representation, or thought, can “apprehend,” can by itself grasp hold of some good. Not some of *das Ding*—this possibility is foreclosed as the subject finds itself perched over *the void of das Ding*, the void of its absence—but some good, something in place of *das Ding*. *Vorstellungrepräsentanz*, in other words, is not any ordinary representation (insofar as representation is thought to be what causes the loss of being as well as the loss of the jouissance of the incestuous relation), but a peculiar kind of representation that permits us to grasp hold of some nonbeing, some jouissance, or satisfaction.

Lacan will further flesh out the implications of the notion of *Vorstellungrepräsentanz* when he says, with explicit reference to the drive, “In my opinion, it is not in this dialectic between [the thing and the thing itself, the phenomenon and the noumenon] the surface and that which is beyond that things are suspended. . . . I set out from the fact that there is something that establishes a fracture, a bi-partition, a splitting of . . . being” (SXI: 106). The old dialectic between

das Ding and *Vorstellungrepräsentanz*, or the noumenal and phenomenal mother, is disbanded with the development of the concept of drive, because the drive lets us conceive satisfaction not as always already lost, but as attainable by the subject. This is where we rejoin the argument we were following in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where Freud opposes the object of the drive, *Vorstellungrepräsentanz*, to Kant's "necessary forms of thought." The ruin of the noumenal beyond and, Lacan adds, the fracture that is thus installed in the surface order of appearances emerge together and are somehow related to a new notion of jouissance that is inaccessible to the subject. This jouissance or satisfaction is represented as an object, such as a breast or a voice, that has been detached from the mother.

The development of the concept of *Vorstellungrepräsentanz* appears, then, to sever the *Ding*-component of the *Nebenmensch* complex into two parts, into *das Ding* and *Vorstellungrepräsentanz*, although *das Ding* is no longer conceivable as a noumenal object and is retained only by the description of *Vorstellungrepräsentanz* as *partial*. It is clear from the theory that when this partial object arrives on the scene, it blocks the path to the old conception of *das Ding*, which is now only a retrospective illusion. It is similarly clear that when he describes the *Vorstellungrepräsentanz*, or ideational representative, as a "delegate" of the body in the psyche—a delegate, specifically, that betrays its mandator—Freud is actually allowing this ideational representative to displace and forbid passage back to the naive notion of a body existing apart from its delegate, which sends the latter forth as its representative. The traitorous delegate and the partial object act not as evidence of a body or a Thing existing elsewhere, but as evidence of the fact that the body and satisfaction have lost the support of the organic body and the noumenal Thing. It is the loss of these supports that causes the fracturing of the surface order of appearances, a splitting within being and not between being and its beyond.

The introduction of the term *Vorstellungrepräsentanz*, in other words, coincides with a splitting that opens up in the phenomenal world and the attainment of some jouissance. What, more specifically, is the relation among these terms? This question provides an opportunity to clear up a lingering misconception. The moment one says that the aim of the drive is its own satisfaction, or that the drive has no purpose other than the repetition of its own trajectory, one is tempted to assert, as an obvious corollary, that the drive is indifferent to external objects. Virtually any object will serve as well as any other to satisfy the drive, which aims not at the object but at the satisfaction it can derive from it. Here the object

remains, precisely, external or is incidental to the drive, a mere alibi or prop serving the end of satisfaction. Although the drive may be obliged to make use of such an object, this is only so it can get at its real aim, *jouissance*.

The first thing to note is that this idea of the drive's indifference to an external object is at odds with Lacan's definition of sublimation as "the elevation of an ordinary object to the dignity of the Thing." This formulation is admittedly confusing; it misleads Lacan himself at points to conflate sublimation and idealization. In these instances the ordinary object seems to become the representation of the Thing, of a noumenal beyond, and this has the effect of erecting a barrier to *jouissance*, which is now conceived as inaccessible. But there are also moments when elevation does not seem to entail this function of representation, but rather entails—in a reversal of the common understanding of sublimation—the substitution of an ordinary object for the Thing. One seeks satisfaction from an ordinary object instead of waiting vainly for the arrival of the Thing. This is the only way to comprehend the satisfaction Lacan experiences on seeing a series of matchboxes, found objects, that were collected by his friend, Jacques Prévert. What strikes Lacan is the extraordinary dignity of these little cardboard boxes, the dignity of their thingness.

It would be preposterous, of course, to speak of the dignity of the instinct's object, which is unceremoniously gobbled or used up once found. Instinct is satiated by the object, but also extinguished by this very satiety. The instinct and its object finish each other off, as it were, as the former quickly has enough of the latter. The drive, on the other hand, does not finish so easily with its object, but keeps turning around it, just as Prévert continues to collect and arrange his proliferating series of matchboxes. If the drive is not only satisfied, but continues to seek and derive satisfaction in the object, this has no doubt something to do with the splitting in the order of appearances of which Lacan speaks. The point is that the drive does not aim beyond the ordinary object at the satisfaction to be attained on the other or thither side of it. This is what happens in the case of the oral instinct, where the goal, food, is used to secure the satisfaction of one's hunger. The food is here merely the means by which the stomach gets filled. If the drive, on the contrary, is said to have no goal, but only an aim, this is because its object is no longer a means of attaining satisfaction, it is an end in itself; it is directly satisfying. It is not a means to something other than itself, but is itself other than itself. The bi-partition takes place within the object, not between the object and the satisfaction that lies beyond it. Lacan puts this another

way in the *Ethics* seminar when he proposes that sublimation ought to be thought not as the substitution of a culturally valorized object for one that is immediately gratifying sexually, but as a *changing of the object itself*. The object of the drive is never identical to itself.³⁷

Since an illustration of this point will no doubt be useful, I would like to consider the work of Jasper Johns. It is not only a particular work—*Target with Plaster Cast*, with its anatomical fragments, or partial objects: hand, heel, ear, foot, penis painted and primly placed in boxes atop a painted canvas target—that brings this artist to mind in this context, it is also his enlightening yet matter-of-fact answers to a series of questions put to him by the critic Leo Steinberg. Steinberg observes that the commonplace objects that are the subject of Johns's work are chosen precisely because "they are nobody's preference, not even his own."³⁸ For instance, the clothes hangers that appear in some of his pieces are not fine-crafted wooden ones such as might have been selected to connote, derisively or admiringly, values of elegance or wealth; nor are they the pastel-colored plastic ones one might find in the closet of a teenage girl. They are rather the plain, wire hangers one gets back from the cleaners and to which no one ever really pays much notice. "No attitude of anger, irony, or estheticism alters the shape" of the objects Johns paints, rather "it's the way things are that is the proper subject [of his] art" (31). The American flags for which he is perhaps most famous do not "stand for" any specific American values, they are not the flags of a chauvinist or a flag-burner. Yet Steinberg keeps pressing, trying to find some preference to explain Johns's choice of objects. Finally the critic asks for this minimal explanation, "Do you use these letter types [commercial stencils] because you like them or because that's how the stencils come?"—to which Johns replies, "But that's what I like about them, that they come that way" (32). Bull's-eye! This answer hits its mark and Steinberg, recognizing this, uses it to summarize Johns's relation to his objects: "He so wills what occurs that what comes from without becomes indistinguishable from what he chooses."

There could not be a better description of drive/sublimation: *it so wills what occurs that the object it finds is indistinguishable from the one it chooses*. Construction and discovery, thinking and being, as well as drive and object are soldered together. The drive's creation, *ex nihilo*, of an object, a thing in the very place where unified jouissance, *das Ding*, is absent, is evoked in this description but without calling up along with it the Romantic image of the artist-creator. On the contrary, Johns seems to disappear, leaving his objects to stand by themselves, "without any

human attitude whatsoever surrounding [them]," Steinberg remarks. The objects stand alone; they do not stand for anything else, reflect anything else, not even Johns's attitude toward them. The will that chooses these objects is absolutely Johns's and yet absolutely impersonal. Lacan sheds some light on this paradox when he speaks of the "headless subject" of the drive. If the ordinary objects of Johns's work are somehow disturbing, it is not exactly correct to say with Steinberg that they are "relieved of man's shadow" or that they "insinuate our absence." What they insinuate is the absence of that egoistic self-consciousness which causes us to bow to external circumstances, to the wills and desires—the preferences—of others or to be moved to pity by their pains and sorrows. Johns's work is affectless only in the sense that it is not passively affected by the objects it paints. But this is not to say that there is no subject, no will or passion discernible in the work which, on the contrary, displays a remarkable passion for and satisfaction in the plain object. The affect of *jouissance*, satisfaction in the object, is not passive; it arouses itself through the active gift of love. If Johns keeps painting the same objects again and again, it is because their ability to fascinate him is inexhaustible—not because they stand for or represent something more than themselves, but because for him they are always more than themselves.

THE OBDURATE DESIRE TO ENDURE

Antigone exemplifies, we said, that which Freud designates under the term *Haftbarkeit*—or *perseverance*—with all the ethical connotations the word conjures up. She steadfastly persists in carrying out her implacable resolve to bury her brother, despite the remonstrations of the pliant and conservative Ismene and the wavering indecision of her community, that is, the Chorus, which is swayed by the merits of both sides to the conflict, just as Hegel will be. In fact, a significant difference between Hegel and Lacan is their respective relations to the Chorus. Whereas Hegel places himself roughly in their role as moderator, partially swayed by each side, Lacan regards the chorus more skeptically. Moreover, whereas Hegel focuses on the merits of Antigone's act of installing Polynices as "a member of the community . . . which sought to . . . destroy him," Lacan views the act of the loving sister as a definitive break with her community: "because the community refuses to [bury Polynices, she] is required . . . to maintain that essential being which is the family *Até*." In other words, the deed Antigone undertakes traces the path of the criminal drive, away from the possibilities the community prescribes and toward the impossible real. That she is "required" to do so testifies to the *zwang* or

compulsion of drive, which is indifferent to external criteria, such as the good opinion of others. It will not be for Lacan a matter of setting another place at the table, of making room for the one brother who was formerly excluded from the rites of the community, but of destroying that community in the name of what is impossible in it. This is not to say that the polis of Thebes is founded on the forbidding of certain ideas or actions, on declaring them off-limits. The impossible is impossible even to conceive under existing conditions—how then could it be forbidden? Ismene's primary role in the drama is to mirror what is currently possible and to mark the unthinkable nature of her sister's decisive deed; she goes so far as to express skepticism that Antigone will be able to carry off her outrageous plan. Informed by her headstrong sister that she *would* do so, Ismene replies, "If you can do it. But you are in love with the impossible" (ll. 104–105). And when Antigone persists, Ismene's skepticism switches to warning, "It is better not to hunt the impossible at all" (ll. 107–108).

Lacan rejects Anouilh's portrayal of Antigone as a "little fascist" hellbent on annihilating everything in her path. What he opposes is not the thesis that her deed destroys, but that it is conducted out of a pure will to destruction, for such a characterization overlooks the affirmation and the satisfaction from which her act derives its unstoppable force. That which Antigone affirms in no uncertain terms is her love for her brother, which, she insists, must be proclaimed, must be exposed to the light of day. Ismene is willing to go only this far in aiding her sister: she will remain silent and not tell anyone of Antigone's crime. It is this offer that provokes Antigone's greatest ire: "I will hate you still worse for silence—should you not proclaim it to everyone" (ll. 99–101). This small exchange goes to the heart of the matter: the singular truth of Antigone's love for her brother must have a universal destiny, must be openly declared. The proclamation of love occurs in a passage that has struck several critics as so strange as to provoke the wish that it would one day be found to be an interpolation: "If my husband had died, I could have had another, and a child by another man, if I had lost the first, but with my mother and father in Hades below, I could never have another brother" (ll. 908–912). This is the sentiment we express when we say of someone, "They broke the mold after they made him." Antigone lets us know that her brother is unique, irreplaceable. There will never be another like him. His value to her depends on nothing he has done nor on any of his qualities. She refuses to justify her love for him by giving reasons for it, she calls on no authority, no deity, none of the laws of the polis to sanction the deed she undertakes on his behalf. She says

only, tautologically, "from my point of view, my brother is my brother." Lacan summarizes her stance this way: "Antigone invokes no other right than that one ['this brother is something unique'], a right that emerges in the language of the ineffaceable character of what is ['my brother is my brother']. . . . What is, is, and it is to this, to this surface, that the unshakeable, unyielding position of Antigone is fixed" (SVII: 279).

Some readers of Lacan may be tempted to turn Antigone's stance into a demand for a certain type of community, one in which the "otherness of the Other" would be respected, differences tolerated, a community of "singularities," where by "singularity" is meant that which cannot make itself public, that which is in retreat from publicity and thus inaccessible to others. But the argument Lacan advances does not support such an extrapolation. The point of his reading is not to insist on the radical, unplumable otherness of the Other, quite the contrary. The singularity of the brother is not in doubt; it is not his "otherness," his inaccessibility that is in question. That Antigone does not give reasons for her love does not imply that her brother is unfathomable to her but that she is, as even the Chorus perceives, autonomous. She gives herself her own law and does not seek validation from any other authority. In other words, it is not the otherness but the nonexistence of the Other on which Lacan's interpretation turns.

Antigone's affirmation of love is, I am arguing, similar to Jasper Johns's affirmative declaration, "But that's what I like about them, that they come that way." Like Antigone, Johns declines to offer reasons for his fascination with targets or American flags or a particular set of commercial stencils; he, too, attests, in Lacan's phrase, to the "ineffaceable character of what is." We are invited once more to taste the tautologism of love, and perhaps now we can say in what it consists, namely, the coincidence, or near coincidence, of the drive with its object. This is what Lacan sometimes called the "illusion of love": one believes the beloved is everything one could hope for without recognizing the role one's love for him or her plays in one's satisfaction. Though her love for her brother does not depend on any of his qualities, Antigone is not indifferent to them; she accepts them all, lovingly. For, love is that which renders what the other is loveable. This is not to say that Antigone overlooks part of what he is, that she fails to see that he is a traitor to Thebes or that he has any personal flaws. It means she loves him as he is, the way he comes. This is quite different from saying she loves something ineffable, unfathomable in him. To be sure, the Lacanian phrase "I love in you something more than you," taken alone, lends itself to either interpretation.

Everything depends on how one interprets the “something more.” Advocates of absolute otherness will see it as an “inaccessible more”—I love your inaccessibility, what I cannot reach in you—whereas Lacan means to say that this “something more” is accessed through love. If one were to receive identical gifts or identical reports of an event one has unfortunately missed both from an acquaintance and from a beloved friend, one would get more, a surplus satisfaction, from the latter. A gift given by a beloved friend ceases to coincide with itself, it becomes itself plus the fact that it was given by the friend. The same is true of everything I get from the beloved, all the qualities, everything he or she is. That is, the “is” of the beloved is split, fractured. The beloved is always slightly different from or more than, herself. It is this more, this extra, that makes the beloved more than just an ordinary object of my attention.

I spoke above of a “near coincidence.” The theory of the drive seems to issue forth in a series of such near coincidences: not only of the drive with its object, but also the drive with sublimation, and the external object with the object *a*. It is as if the very function of the drive were this continuous opening up of small fractures between things. Immediately after noting that Antigone’s proclamation of love is expressed in the “ineffaceable character of what is,” Lacan adds that what is is ineffaceable “in spite of the flood of . . . transformations.” Here again the being, the “what is” that is the object of the drive is described as ever so slightly different from itself, as indistinguishable from a flood of transformations. The singularity of Polynices, what he is, is synonymous with these *surface* transformations, the ruptures in the order of his appearance. The drive continues to circle the object because the latter is never identical to itself, is split from itself.

Lacan’s claim is not that Antigone immortalizes her brother, erecting a monument to his memory, but that she immortalizes the family *Até*, that point of madness where the family lineage is undone or overturns itself. “Immortalize” does not mean here to preserve in memory, but to continue not to forget that vitalizing fracture that permits one to “go mad,” to dissolve oneself in a transforming act. One must not confuse the fact that Antigone is unyielding in carrying out her deed with a rigidity of being. If she is able to undertake such a fundamental break with the existing laws of her community, this is only because she has first been able to unloose herself from the fundamental law of her own being. It is not only the object of the drive that is split from itself; the subject, too, is fractured through the drive’s repetitions. Because the play begins only after the critical events of her brother’s death and Creon’s cruel edict, some readers have been

persuaded to see her as simply intransigent, unchanging in the very core of her being. But Antigone is portrayed on the contrary as a figure of radical metamorphosis, whose terrifying transformation we are not permitted to witness but are required to imagine. For the most part this metamorphosis must be supposed to have taken place just before the play begins, but some trace of it remains in the messenger's report of the screeching, birdlike cries that Antigone emits on learning that her brother's body has been re-exposed after the first burial. It is this wild tearing away from herself, this inhuman rather than heroic metamorphosis that is the subject of Lacan's analysis. For, the ethics of psychoanalysis is concerned not with the other, as is the case with so much of the contemporary work on ethics, but rather with the subject, who metamorphoses herself at the moment of encounter with the real of an unexpected event. Lacan's ethical imperative, "Do not give way on your desire," proposes itself as anything but an insistence that one stubbornly conform to one's own personal history. In short, the ethics of psychoanalysis filiates itself with Kant's argument that ethical progress has nothing to do with that form of progress promoted by modern industry, or the "service of good," but is rather a matter of personal conversion, of the subjective necessity of going beyond oneself.

A perennial accusation against psychoanalysis is that Freud's thesis that the subject is driven to reproduce an initial state, to recapture or find again its first satisfying object, is determinist. This accusation appears to be confirmed by the notion of the archetype invented by Freud's disciple, Jung. According to this notion, we can find in the psyche of each individual subject "some archaic relation, some primitive mode of access of thoughts, some world that is there like some shade of an ancient world surviving in ours" (SXI: 153). But Freud opposes Jung when he argues in *The Ego and the Id* that "[n]o external vicissitude can be experienced or undergone by the id [or: by the drive] except by way of the ego, which is the representative of the external world to the id. Nevertheless, it's not possible to speak of direct inheritance in the ego. *It is here that a gulf between an actual individual and the concept of a species becomes evident.*"³⁹ Freud here takes his distance not only from Jung, but from the description Aristotle offers of animal instinct's obedience to the species' dictates, and from Feuerbach's contention that the happiness drive inscribes the requirements of the individual subject in the researches carried out by the species. What is wrong with all three, in Freud's opinion, is that they attempt to eliminate the gap between individual and species in some way. Freud argues that this gap can never be reabsorbed; moreover, it is the very maintenance

of this gap that permits the individual subject from being annihilated by the history she inherits. That which the individual inherits from her species, her family, her race cannot be located merely in a stateable law or dictate, but includes also the *Até* of the law, that excess in the law which cannot be articulated within it. Because the law contains this mad excess where it loses its head, as it were, the subject can carry out the law or carry on the family name without simply repeating in the present what has already been forseen and dictated by the past. Antigone is not fated by the crime of her incestuous parents to a similarly tragic crime. The criminal being she safeguards is that of the law itself, which contains its own transgression. If Antigone is fated by her family *Até*, it is in this paradoxical sense: she is *destined to overturn her fate through her act*.

Antigone's *Haftbarkeit*, her perseverance to the end or to the momentous conclusion of an act that will necessarily overturn her, is contrasted to the *Fixierarbeit* of Creon as conversion, or self-rupture, to modern progress. This contrast lets us observe the difference between "acting in conformity with the real of desire" and acting in a self-interested way, or acting to preserve one's own continuity with oneself. The principle of *Fixierarbeit* is articulated by Lacan as: "Carry on working. Work must go on. . . . As far as desires are concerned, come back later. Make them wait" (S VII: 315). *Work* here signifies something different, something opposed to the act insofar as work never concludes, it keeps going—or rather waiting. What is it that holds one back from satisfaction? On what is Creon fixated?

To answer, one must refer to the concept of inhibition. In *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety* Freud offers as a memorable example of inhibition the hand of the obsessional, which is suddenly incapable of performing the simple act of writing. To release his hand and the flow of his thoughts, the obsessional, it is often said, must first de-erotize the process of writing and thinking. This theory has no doubt contributed to some of the confusion surrounding sublimation, which is assumed to spring from a separation of thought from sex or *jouissance*. But our account of sublimation paints a different picture; sublimation does not separate thought from sex, but rather from the supposed subject of knowledge, that is, from the Other. For, the satisfaction of the drive by sublimation testifies to the autonomy of the subject, her independence from the Other, as we have argued. But if the *inhibition of the drive* by the achieved aim of its satisfaction bears witness to our independence, the *inhibition of the obsessional's hand*, and of Creon's fixation on the laws of the State, betray a dependence of *jouissance* on a supposed subject of knowledge. This does not mean that enjoyment becomes proscribed, that pleasure

is forbidden by the Other, but that *jouissance* is now prescribed: "Henceforth you will find your enjoyment in the following way!"

This thesis garners support from something Freud says in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Quoting a phrase from *Faust's* Mephistopheles, he speaks of a "driving factor which will permit of no halting at any position attained, but, in the poet's words, 'ungebändigt immer vorwärts dringt [presses ever forward unsubdued]'" (SE 18: 42). This phrase seems to apply to the intransigence of Creon and Antigone, both of whom appear to be, in the technical sense, driven. But Freud then *distinguishes* this particular "driving factor" from that which produces sublimations. To what does Faustian drivenness owe its unsubduable pressure? This is Freud's answer: "it is the difference in the amount between the pleasure of satisfaction which is *demande*d and that which is actually *achieve*d that provides the driving factor which will permit of no halting." The phrasing recalls Feuerbach's damning critique of a certain modern notion of immortality.

While Antigone is driven by the satisfaction afforded by her love for her brother, which provides the pressure or tension necessary to act, Creon is driven by an idealization of the difference between the satisfaction demanded and that which can be achieved through work. In psychoanalytic terms we would say that Creon is driven by his superego, which is that psychic agency which fosters in the subject a distaste for mundane, compromised pleasures and maintains us in a state of dissatisfaction. Creon's fixation on the lost object causes him to be relatively indifferent to all others available to him. He remains glued to an ideal he will never attain, since it is derived from his nostalgia for something he never possessed. One often hears it said that the superego is an internalization of the laws and ideals of the culture or community; this simplification misses the fact that the laws and ideals of the community are themselves fabricated only on the basis of an idealization of dissatisfaction. If the superego always demands more sacrifice, more work, this is because the ideal it sets in front of the subject is kept aloft by a loss that the subject is unable to put behind him. The superego attempts to mask the loss of the Other by posing as witness or reminder of that absolute satisfaction which can no longer be ours. The stubborn unity of purpose Creon displays is indistinguishable from the aggressivity he unleashes toward everything—even his own ego—that falls short of this ideal. This stubbornness is thus not inconsistent with his failure of nerve toward the end of the play, his bending to public opinion. The fixation on dissatisfaction, in other words, does not always manifest itself as consistency of character, since it exposes the ego to the vicissitudes of public

opinion in which it is always possible to find validation of the superego's harsh judgment.

The superego thus maintains a rigorous division between that satisfaction available to us and the one that lies beyond. It is possible to argue that there where Agamben has observed the notion of "bare" or "nude" life emerging out of the metaphysical positing of a realm of pure Being, "indeterminant and impenetrable" and located beyond an "unthinkable limit" that separates us from all it offers, there, too, one can recognize the handiwork of the superego. If, as Lacan argues, Creon represents a sovereign law that knows no limit, if he seeks "the good of all without limit," this is because his superegoic positing of a pure satisfaction or absolute goal is founded on the prior positing of an external limit to the world. This limit de completes, empties out, all his endeavors, all his satisfactions, causing him to strive fruitlessly toward a goal he will never attain. Creon's hounding of Polynices beyond the limit of death prefigures modern science's hounding of the subject beyond death, apparently without limit, into infinitely extendable states (in principle, at least) of *coma passé*. When she covers the exposed body of her brother, Antigone raises herself out of the conditions of naked existence to which Creon remains bound.