The Shame of Being Human

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Abstract

This essay develops the question of shame in the context of the memory of atrocities. Drawing upon Gilles Deleuze's claim on the shame of being man, it offers a literary and aesthetic critique of war and violence in order to cast a poetic light over the politics of shame. Addressing specifically how shame functions politically in the development of the liberal conception of humanity, it makes the case for critiquing the violence of the past through the art of the political, which is to say—the poetic field of interruption that is open to a politics to come.

Introduction

> The artist or the philosopher is quite incapable of creating a people […] But books of philosophy and works of art contain their sum of unimaginable sufferings that forewarn of the advent of a people. They have resistance in common—their resistance to death, to servitude, to the intolerable, to shame, and to the present.
>
> —Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (110)

In their powerful and sensitive readings of the testimonies of Primo Levi, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari force us to confront what they termed the "shame of being man" (*What is Philosophy?* 107). Such shame, the authors explain, derives from the understanding that man is capable of all too human atrocities in their claims to humanism and that humanity would be complict in the the most inhumane acts upon earthly fellows. For Deleuze and Guattari, however, this is not simply about forcing us to confront the ways in which historic fascism forced many to shamefully compromise with power. Wilhelm Reich has already set out those details with some purpose in his still all too relevant *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*. The compromise also demanded a more complex and sophisticated grasp of the question of human survival—or more important still, what happens when the political strategies of populations are reduced to the barest of bio-political conditions such that life itself appears at the base levels of its very existence? Deleuze later explains:

> It does not mean we are all assassins, that we are all guilty […] of Nazism. Levi says it admirably: It doesn't mean the executioners and the victims are all the same […] There are a lot of people who maintain, 'Oh yes, we are all guilty' […] No, nothing of the sort. We cannot confuse the executioners with the victim. So the 'shame of being a man' does not mean we are all the same […] The 'shame of being a man' means at once 'how could men do that'—some men, that is, other than me—how could they do that? And second, how

> have I myself nonetheless taken sides? I didn't become an executioner, but I still took sides to have survived, and there is a certain shame in having survived. (Deleuze and Parnet, "R as in Resistance")[1]

Such questions of survival, as Deleuze maintained, were less about the old Sovereign right to protect, than they were about the "survival of a population that believes itself to be better than its enemy, which it now treats not as the juridical enemy of the old sovereign but as a toxic or infectious agent, a sort of 'biological danger'" (*Foucault* 76). But what has become of this vexed question of survival in the twenty-first century? Are authors still compelled to write, as Deleuze insisted, because we are continuously witnesses to atrocity and have been forced to inherit a shamed existence? Do we really still feel the shame about the slaughter and genocides of the past? What form does shame take as our politics is increasingly reduced to the sheer question of survival in the face of worldly extinction? Indeed, have we not seen shame turned back upon itself so that everything is open to a form of public shaming? And was Deleuze correct to insist that resistance to shame is found in the arts and the idea of a more poetic subjectivity (which certainly should not be confused with some liberal notion of humanism and its bourgeoise conception of the arts that gives itself over to a cultured and learned disposition) that liberates the otherwise imprisoned life?

This paper will begin to address these questions by offering a political and philosophical survey of the contemporary security terrain via the corpse littered landscapes of the twentieth century. It will do so by arguing for a more rigorous engagement with the literary field, as a way to critique the violence of the present, along with the possibilities of liberating the subject from the specter of its own demise that has become the hallmark of contemporary security reasoning in which the very idea of worldy annihilation is now part of everyday political thinking. *Thinking against violence in the present demands harnessing the political and philosophical power of the literary imagination, which demands liberating*

[1] This quote comes from Pierre-André Boutang's documentary *Gilles Deleuze from A to Z* (2011, *L'Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze*) in which Deleuze is talking together with Claire Parnet about the letter "R as in Resistance."

the poetic in thought and action. What is understood to be the poetic figure here, as Deleuze intimated, refers to an aesthetic conceptualization of 'styles' notably found in the arts—especially literature. The poetic figure embodies the violence of the times, while through its imaginative and speculative angles of vision, allows for alternative mediations which break free from the spectral destinies of positivist enslavements whose technical modes of thinking have been so complicit in the dehumanization of life in the name of humanism. To achieve this, the essay will open onto a discussion of the politics of shame, then engage more intently with the importance of the literary and aesthetics fields, before turning to the embodied question of justice and how the poetic provides a means for transgressing the present via an account of death that exposes more intently the infinite demand of art. In doing so, the essay foregrounds the burden of shame with a poetic reading in order to break out of the juridical account of peace and security, which continues to be complicit in the exemption of life from the violence of its making.

The Politics of Shame

The question of shame, as testified by Levi, amongst others, brings us directly to a complex interplay between acts of violence and its forced witnessing of the disruption of absolute moral demarcations, such violence, as Giorgio Agamben has noted in *Homo Sacer*, becomes all the more problematic as it takes place by perpetrators without a crime seen to be committed. Shame as such is often applied as a posthumous inscription, appearing after the event in order to codemn the past while steering history in a morally framed way. The very destruction of the human, even while they are still alive, does not simply happen in 'exceptional' or extreme conditions. On the contrary, violence often appears arbitrary, banal, and normalized in its routine enactments of torturous suffering. Attentions as such have been rightly drawn to the investments populations make in the perpetuation of oppressive logics, which defy neat explanations tied to ideological emblems. This is what Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman have identified to be the recurrence of a "concretionary imaginary," demanding continuous vigilance

to everyday forces of fascism and human subjugation, including the hidden order of politics and violence, and the ongoing reproduction of fascistic aesthetics, which frame the witnessing of violence.

Shame itself, however, is not a value-neutral category. It is often *prefigured* in the collective consciousness. Inextricably bound to the politics of authenticating 'the victim,' the question of shame is continuously mediated through hierarchies of tragedy through which some lives are presented as more valuable in death than others. We thus learn to feel shame through deeply politicised proceses of affective learning, with guilt appearing as part of a truly formidable pedagogical and culturally invested force. How many Western scholars, for instance, begin and end with the Holocaust without attending to the wider genocides in history—not least indigenous and racial persecutions wrought by modern political projects? It is mistaken to also see shame as an object that might be studied as most commonly within a psychological frame. Of course, the feeling of shame, like remorse and genuine regret, may be evident in the reflective sensibilities of perpetrators of violence and widespread slaughter. The shame of being man, however, points to a more generalizable field in which the forces of history rightly or wrongly assume certain political qualities by drawing our more intimate attentions to particular memories of suffering and human devastation.

Nor is shame quite so self-evident, as a superficial reading of Deleuze might suggest. This point has been rightly made by Zygmunt Bauman, who has noted:

> The unspoken terror permeating our collective memory of the Holocaust (and more than contingently related to the overwhelming desire not to look the memory in its face) is the gnawing suspicion that the Holocaust could be more than an aberration, more than a deviation from an otherwise straight path of progress, more than a cancerous growth on the otherwise healthy body of the civilized society; that, in short, the Holocaust was not an antithesis of modern civilization and everything (or so we like to think) it stands for. (Bauman 8)

As an historic event born of modernity, Bauman writes, it was "fully in keeping with everything we know about our civilization, its guiding spirit, its priorities, its immanent vision of the world—and of the proper way to pursue human happiness together with a perfect society" (9). Shame as such would become part of our own hubristic enterprises, but also part of our own fallibilities and inability to resist the instrumentalization of life.

The shame of being human thus conceived works in many ambiguous and at times conflicting ways.[2] On one level, this ethical appeal to the deeply vulnerable humansistic impulse within has to do with the experience of a catastrophe that now lies as a condition of political philosophy and even constitutes its 'internal presupposition': the shame of being a survivor, which becomes equal to the shame of remaining human in the face of this growing catastrophe on a daily basis. On the other hand, the haunting failure of the ethical also concerns the repeated attempts on the part of those who seek to conceal themselves from this shame by invoking moral concepts like desperate alibis, or to assign the different degrees of guilt and distribute justice among victims, executioners and accomplices. The very idea of a just war is the most pertinent example. And yet, merely the act of living has become a political decision for everyone today, who have to some unconscious degree become an accomplice to this daily catastrophe, no matter how distant in space and time, or how much a particular group might claim to suffer 'equally,' though not in the same way, since as we have seen especially with the global refugees, the birth of every particular right also brings with it a new classes of strangers and those who do not have an allotted share.

From the perspective of power, on a second level, the apportioning of shame can often be divorced from its operations, along with the overt politicization of tragedies and violent encounters, which often works by displacing attentions. "Let's just blame and shame the poor for the rise of contemporary fascism," liberals can often be heard crying out today. Indeed, the capacity for historical shame to be appropriated and used in the furtherance of violence is all too evident to students of even the

[2] On the political problematic of shame in the thought of Deleuze, see Buchanan 73-93.

most recent history of warfare: The failure to intervene in Rwanda, for example, being one of the most vocal pretexts to summon forth the invasion forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. Genocidal shame would in these instances underwrite the slaughter of tens of thousands all in the name of humanitarianism and the desire to save strangers—especially from themselves. Shame, however, as Deleuze had already noted, has the potential for a double reading, forcing us to confront the hidden order of violence. Hence, more than resurrecting the forgotten casualties of history, the queston of shame offers alterative ways to 'figure out' dogmatic images of thought into which life has been violently castigated.

The burden of shame is frequently deployed in the guise of a resurrected 'moral symbol' where images of past atrocities can allow for violence in the present, as the sacred becomes a vehicle to smuggle violence back into the body politic. It is a figurative specter, which is either placed onto the shoulders of others who have benefitted least from the plunder of the enlightenment, or more recently, tied to the moral justification for violence to sanction liberal interventionism. In light of this, asking, "what is shame" is futile, as it merely points to prefigured ideological claims, that is, the event of its occurrence is already determined. What matters more is the ways in which the concept of shame functions politically, setting out in the process the moral parameters (including the justification for violence), which, emanating from the tragic figures of history, author the conditions of the new by invoking new scared symbols of power to authenticate meaning and truth. Whose shame are we actually referring to? What is being authored and what is being denied through its very utterance? How is the politics of survival bound up and further released through its burdensome discourse? And how is the very idea of the 'victim' set adrift upon its blood-soaked shores?

In a particularly insightful contribution on the horrors of the twentieth century, Simona Forti's *New Demons* has set out the problem of violence's relationship to the victim (importantly in that order), in what she terms "The Dostoyevsky Paradigm." Drawing figurative attention to Nicholai Stavrogin from Fyodor Dostoyevsky's powerful and prophetic masterpiece *Demons*, Forti points to a predominance of a historically grounded and deeply structured understanding of mass

violence, in which absolute power is wagered against the absolute victim. Focusing on the ghost of Stavrogin who, like a fallen angel, is said to be the most magnificent and the greatest of the damned in all of Dostoyevsky's work, Forti recognizes how his body is inscribed with the veritable markings of the violence of a century, symbolizing absolute power and absolute vulnerability, which further underwrite the ontologically determined signature of evil that is largely explained in terms of the "abyss of freedom" (35), or what Bauman in *Modernity and the Holocaust* would identify as being modernity's "aberration" (7).

Definitive here is a reading of extreme atrocities, which often analyzes their occurrence by invoking foundational typologies as evident and determinable, neatly marking out *wicked demons* and *absolute victims*. Forti explains this by recounting Stavrogin's confession to Bishop Tikhon in a crucial chapter on the desecration of the young girl Matryosha:

> The freedom that makes him capable of destruction goes past the point of no return. It does so, without any possibility of redemption, when the wickedness he is capable of has its object the absolute innocence of the victim. It is one of the greatest literary moments in the book, but also one of its most philosophically eloquent. This relationship of oppression—*with an all powerful perpetrator on one side, faced by the total powerlessness of the victim on the other*—expresses what I believe is Dostoyevsky's concept of *evil in its absolute, pure form* […] And if in this case of the radical action of evil is portrayed in the microcosm of a personal relationship between two people, a little later it will be ready to be projected on a large scale and refined, providing his twentieth century heirs with the hermeneutic key to absolute political evil. (40, emphasis in original)

As Forti rightly argues, while Dostoyevsky nuances his grandiose dialectical tensions in the widely cited fable of the Grand Inquisitor from the *Brothers Karamazov*, his literary works are still found wanting when

applied to the behaviors of the masses. In ways that are reminiscent of the warnings provided by Wilhelm Reich in *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, the Grand Inquisitor fable is rightly shown to be limited insofar as it rests upon an understanding of the organization of violence that draws upon the docility of populations. It thus falls short when accounting for techniques of domination, through which power can manipulate the desire for violence in life-affirming ways, whether it is by encouraging the masses to embrace policies of racial and social engineering that often revel prejudices already existent within the political system, or more troubling still, by positively investing in the willful subjugation of others. For Forti, overcoming this (while also being mindful of Forti's problematic attachment to the moral and sacred entrapments of good and evil) demands a return to the work of Levi:

> Thus, by ideally opposing Levi to Dostoyevsky and what the Russian writer represents, we can conclude that the Muselmann—what resulted from the degradation of the camp—was not solely and not predominantly the product of the abyssal freedom of a subject who had taken the place of God; nor was he the object on which the perverse *jouissance* of the death impulse had been discharged. He became what he became through a dense but ordinary weave of intentions, actions, and objectives whose weft proved fatal. (308)

The Scream of Humanity

The shame of being human, imagined by Deleuze and engaged with here, encourages engagement with both literature and the visual arts as a different order of resistance and enagagement. Writing on the work of T. E. Lawrence, Deleuze argues that "[t]he finest writers have singular conditions of perception that allow them to draw on or shape aesthetic percepts like veritable visions" (*Essays Critical and Clinical* 116). Lawrence, in particular, he argues, expresses "a profound desire, a tendency to project—things, into reality, into the future and even into the sky—an image of himself and others so intense that it *has a life of its own*" (117-8,

emphasis in original). Deleuze reserved the same 'revolutionary' qualities—what he terms the "fabulatory function" for the visual arts and their capacity to free themselves from representational schematics (118). As Deleuze writes, "no art is figurative. Paul Klee's famous formula—'Not to render the visible, but to render visible' means nothing else. The task of painting is defined as the attempt to render visible forces that are not themselves visible" (*Francis Bacon* 56).

For Deleuze, the artist who was most successful at rendering the invisible forces visible was Francis Bacon, whose isolated figures "break with representation, to disrupt narration, to escape illustration, to liberate the figure" (6). As he writes, "Bacon's Figures seem to be one of the most marvelous responses in the history of painting to the question, How can one make invisible forces visible? This is the primary function of the Figures" (41). Indeed, for Deleuze, the importance of Bacon is that he breaks away from "figuration" and its penchant for imposing a determinable narrative into the scene, by elevating the figure to such importance that the hidden forces of violence appear more defining—"a deformed and deforming movement that at every moment transfers the real image onto the body in order to constitute the Figure" (14). Such a constitution of the body, for Deleuze, points to a different order of violence where movement is defining, "as if invisible forces were striking the head from many different angles" (42). Or, as Bacon would say, "[w]e nearly always live through screens—a screened existence. And I sometimes think, when people say my work looks violent, that perhaps I have from time to time been able to clear away one or two of the veils or screens" (Bacon 82).

Deleuze's intervention has encouraged a rethinking of aesthetics to foreground what Jacques Rancière has termed as the "Figures of History," whose challenging figural specters to our images of thought should provoke much more purposeful and incisive critique. And yet as Richard J. Bernstein explains, when confronting the realities of violence, our political and philosophical responses are found wanting:

> Even a momentous event like 9/11 does not provoke much *thinking* about violence. Our age may well be called "The

> Age of Violence" because representations of real or imagined violence (sometimes blurred and fused together) are inescapable. But this surfeit of images and talk of violence dulls and even inhibits thinking. (VIII, emphasis in original)

Understanding the shame of being human thus requires a more attentive appreciation of the historical present of violence and its continuums.

In Rancière's *Figures of History*, he draws attention to the aesthetic grammars of suffering, whether in photography or art, whose spectral hauntings come to embody the tragedies of modernity. Our first glimpse of this appears with Larry Rivers's *Erasing the Past II* that adorns the cover of Rancière's aptly titled book. Rivers's subtle erasure of the image of a Holocaust survivor (invoking all-too-evident connections with the cover art of the Abacus edition of Primo Levi's *If This Is a Man / The Truce*) captures the author's contention that we must approach all representations of historical events with skepticism—questioning what is memorialized, what is erased, what is being shown, what is being slowly forgotten. History, he claims, should be rethought by attending to the hidden traces. This leads him to argue that "history isn't done yet with turning itself into stories" (94). This personally draws him to range of compelling examples from Francisco Goya, Otto Dix, to Claude Lanzmann and Zoran Mušič in order to highlight particular attention to the victims of historical force to rework the aesthetic field of worldly perception and its distributions of the sensible. This demands a rethinking of the power of aesthetics. As he writes, conclusions are

> [s]ometimes too easily drawn that the extermination is "unrepresentable" or "unshowable"—notions in which various heterogeneous arguments conveniently merge: the joint incapacity of real documents and fictional imitations to reflect the horror experienced; the ethical indecency of representing that horror; the modern dignity of art which is beyond representation and the indignity of art as an endeavor after Auschwitz. (48-49)

Bacon work's returns here with considerable expressive force. The artist draws us to two particular works, which include his *Painting 1946* and *Study for a Portrait* (1949). The former masterpiece is arguably Bacon's crowning achievement in terms of revealing the violence of the body in ways that unsettle illustrative determinism. The timing of the piece certainly invokes connections to fascism and its theological orientations. And yet the ambiguities of the main figure offer many challenging readings, such that divisions between human/animal, screaming/laughter, witness/spectacle and executioner/victim are difficult to establish. The painting also continues Bacon's fascination with *The Scream*, which as Deleuze suggests points to a "coupling of forces, the perceptible force of the scream and the imperceptible force that makes one scream" (43). The screaming figures as such points to futurity as it "captures or detects an invisible force," the diabolical future, which "contains them potentially" (60-61). But what of *Study for a Portrait* (1949), which pre-figures with remarkable similarity the figure of Adolf Eichmann? What diabolical future might be forcing this most banal of Figures to scream at its coming?

The Trials of Humanity

The witnessing of violence and its vexed questions of shame and complicity are doubly complicated by the issue of justice. Nowhere was this more apparent than with Hannah Arendt's widely documented and theorized critique of the Eichmann trials, what this meant in terms of the legal intent for this crime, and how this related to the conscious act of thinking about the actions committed on behalf of the perpetrators. The term "banal" was used as a counterpoint here to decry both the perceived thoughtful actions of Eichmann, among others, along with emphasizing the wider political significance in terms of what was actually being put on trial. As Judith Butler has explained:

> By writing about Eichmann, Arendt was trying to understand what was unprecedented in the Nazi genocide—not in order to establish the exceptional case for Israel, but in

> order to understand a crime against humanity, one that would acknowledge the destruction of Jews, Gypsies, gay people, communists, the disabled and the ill. Just as the failure to think was a failure to take into account the necessity and value that makes thinking possible, so the destruction and displacement of whole populations was an attack not only on those specific groups, but on humanity itself. As a result, Arendt objected to a specific nation-state conducting a trial of Eichmann exclusively in the name of its own population. (Butler)

What Arendt perhaps could not quite fully grasp at the time, was that she would figure in the *drama of justice* and its spectacle, which she vocally condemned. She was not a distanced observer or some 'outside' critic. On the contrary, she became part of the lived memory of its performance and key to the way we understand the political fabrics, tensions and deliberations continuously remade through the forensic details of the criminal proceedings. Michael Shapiro has been at the forefront of new thinking on this by developing trans-disciplinary methods which have been pioneering in the field of International Affairs and Security Studies. Writing on the performative nature of justice in a powerful reworking of the Foucauldian idea of the "dispositif," Shapiro argues that "the primary discursive condition of possibility for the Nuremburg war crimes trials was a new collective subject, 'humanity'" (15). And in order to raise the possibility that such a crime as a crime against humanity existed, there was a need to develop juridical discourse armed with a new anthropological object—namely the human as a collective entity, which could be consciously endangered.

Shapiro returns to the scene of humanity's trial by putting forward what he terms "literary justice," which is said to offer a more aesthetically astute approach to critical thinking by deliberately disrupting the epistemological ground upon which the pursuit of justice is often articulated. Bypassing the legalistic account of rights so often tied to juridical frameworks, Shapiro draws attention to a particular moment from Mathias Énard's remarkable novel *Zone*, where the key protagonist,

Francis Servain Mirković, sees his former commander Tihomir Blaškić on trial in The Hague. This is worth citing as it speaks directly to the performative enactment of justice and its complex lines of subjectification so often missed by legal descriptions:

> In his box at The Hague among the lawyers the interpreters the prosecutors the witnesses the journalists the onlookers the soldiers of the UNPROFOR who analyzed the maps for the judges commented on the possible provenance of bombs according to the size of the crater which gave rise to so many counter-arguments all of it translated into three languages […] everything had to be explained from the beginning, historians testified to the past of Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia since the Neolithic era by showing how Yugoslavia was formed, the geographers commented on demographic statistics, censuses, land surveys, political scientists explained the differential political forces present in the 1990s. (Énard 80)

Here the anti-figure of humanity, Blaškić, appears inserted by Énard into a conceptual landscape, which in the process of offering a tremendously powerful, intricate and multifaceted form of political fabulation, re-enforces the idea of justice as a network of relations wholly dependent upon regimes of visibility and processes of subjectivation. It also sets out the complex interplay between the figures that populate the text, allowing for the issue of violence to be temporally framed; as Mirković further laments:

> I thought about what I would have said if they questioned me, how would I have explained the inexplicable, probably I too would have had to go back to the dawn of time, to the frightened prehistoric man painting in his cave to reassure himself, to Paris making off with Helen, to the death of Hector, the sack of Troy, to Aeneas reaching the shores of Latium, to the Romans carrying off the Sabine women […]

> Blaškić in his box is one single man and has to answer for all our crimes, according to the principle of individual criminal responsibility which links him to history, he's a body in a chair wearing a headset, he's on trail in place of all those who held a weapon. (Énard 80)

This narrative certainly echoes Carl Schmitt's criticism in *The Concept of the Political* of the formidable power possessed by those able to declare a person to be an "enemy of humanity." There are also two important qualifications to add here to this narrative, which Énard addresses. Firstly, despite the fact that the idea of the enemy of humanity is often presented as a correlative development to the age of liberal reason—especially its internationalization in the post-Cold War period (notably evidenced with the NATO intervention in Kosovo), its recourse to legal forms of justice is wholly contingent. As he narrates of the "characters in the Great Trial," it is all about further problematizing by inserting

> [s]ome order into the law of murder, charged with knowing at what instant a bullet in the head was legitimate de jure and at what instant it constituted a grave breach of the law and customs of war, referring endlessly to the rulings of Nuremburg, Jerusalem, Rwanda, historical precedents recognized as such by the status of the court, retracting customary international law in the interpretation of the Geneva conventions. (Énard 82)

Secondly, related to this, is Jacques Derrida's conception of law he sets out in his article "Force of Law." *Contra* Kafka, the very nature of law itself embodies a violent force for intervention, which not only literally inscribes the body with markers of guilt before crimes are said to have occurred, but it also cannot be divorced from the realm of power politics and the way its coding is inscribed through the victories of battles (35-36). In this regard, the vaunted international *laws of war* so often cited by liberal advocates of the International Criminal Court, can be more purposefully inverted to read properly as being the Wars of Law,

notably manifest in appropriations of guilt, complicity and shame for the furtherance of political agendas and moral claims. Such forceful interventions have proven time and again to be masks of mastery for regimes of power, which in the process of absorbing the weight of history, colonize the political imaginary, inscribe particular narratives of shame, and repackage the burdens of historical guilt and human reckoning.

Figuring out the Future

What form then does the future take, if its styles for living are already burdened by the shame of history and its times of catastrophe? Can the future be 'figured out' with respect to resisting the colonization of the imaginary? Countering the problem of representing humanity's veritable negation and the shame it brings upon us all, Rancière's Deleuzian inspired approach seeks to resurrect what is for many cultural theorists an all-too-familiar (if unresolved) debate on the political function of the arts. As he writes:

> So we have to revise Adorno's famous phrase, according to which art is impossible after Auschwitz. The reverse is true: after Auschwitz, to show Auschwitz, art is the only thing possible, because art always entails the presence of an absence; because it is the very job of art to reveal something that is invisible, through the controlled power of words and images, connected or unconnected; because art alone thereby makes the human perceptible, felt. (Rancière 49-50)

Rancière's return to the Adorno question should be taken seriously. Its purpose is to rethink the political function of art, and, in doing so, start the process that will allow us to reimagine a more artistic conception of the political that is not simply tied to perceptions of endangerment and the pure task of human survival, which is the default for all forms of politics tied to the security imperative. This becomes all the more urgent when the burden of guilt is no longer aligned with the violent weight of history, but the shame now being expressed by the figures of

history, those violated and hunting bodies who reveal most fully the intolerable violence of the human condition, who are yet to appear on the horizon, even though they are already written as though their earthly predicament will be violent, and their fate catastrophically determined.

We are reminded again here of Deleuze's reading of Bacon, who faces the intolerable effectively by "distinguish[ing] between two violences, that of the spectacle and that of sensation, and declares that the first must be renounced to reach the second, it is a kind of declaration of faith in life" (43). Indeed, for Deleuze, this homage to pay Bacon in terms of affirming against the horror of the spectacle the "powerful Figure of life," might also be "paid to Beckett or Kafka" whose "indomitable figures" disrupt dogmatic images of thought through their "insistence and their presence" (44). It is here that Jacques Derrida's idea of "survival by deferral" resonates:

> Survival in the conventional sense of the term means to continue to live, but also to live after death. Speaking of translation, Walter Benjamin took pains to distinguish between überleben on the one hand, to live after death, as a book can survive the death of its author, or a child the death of parents, and on the other hand, fortleben, living on, to keep on living. All the ideas that have helped me in my work, notably those regarding the trace or the spectral, were related to the idea of "survival" as a basic dimension. It does not derive from either to live or to die. No more than what I call "originary mourning." It is something that does not wait for so-called "actual" death. (51)[3]

The death of the subject as such appears here for Derrida as an aporia that both haunts and yet fascinates:

[3] These words appeared in Jacques Derrida's last interview before his death, which was published in *Le Monde* in August 2004. It would subsequently be published in book form — Jacques Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally: The Last Interview* (2007).

> The trace I leave to me means at once my death, to come or already come, and the hope that it will survive me. It is not an ambition of immortality; it is fundamental. I leave here a bit of paper, I leave, I die; it is impossible to exit this structure; it is the unchanging form of my life. Every time I let something go, I live my death in writing. An extreme process; we exert ourselves without knowing whom exactly the thing we leave behind is confided to. Who is going to inherit, and how? It is a question that one can pose oneself today more than ever. It constantly preoccupies me. (32-33)

This ultimately brings us back to Deleuze who certainly appreciated this double meaning to one's encounter with death. As he wrote in relation to Maurice Blanchot's mediation on the subject: "Any death is double, by the cancellation of the great difference that it represents in extension, by the swarming and the liberation of small differences that it implies in intensities" (*Difference and Repetition* 333). That is to say, while there is on one side a very personal experience with death that simple affirms the finitude of our fleeting existence, something lives on in the realm of the infinitely possible and yet to be anticipated trajectories of "the virtual." Or as Blanchot would explain,

> [m]y speech is a warning that at this very moment death is loose in the world, that it has suddenly appeared between me, as I speak, and the being I address: it is there between us as the distance that separates us, but this distance is also what prevents us from being separated, because it contains the condition for all understanding. (*The Work of Fire* 323-24)

Such an understanding cannot be explained through a political analytics of fintitide alone, it needs to cross over in the void itself as the prexistant condition of life in its raw abstract potentiality—a life that learns the history of shame, but doesn't seek to burden the future with the violence of the present and the sacred bonds that bind us to violence as such.

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Biography

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