Introduction

4. For Badiou these normativities are exemplified in such proclivities as “resignation, renunciation, the lesser evil, together with moderation, the end of humanity as a spiritual force, and the critique of ‘grand narratives’” (Badiou, The Century, 31).
6. Hallward, Badiou, 14. See also Badiou’s claim that the “notion of the real refuse[s] its early Lacanian associations with horror, brute materiality, mystery, and fixity” (The Century, 15).
8. See, e.g., in The Century:

If you think the world can and must change absolutely; that there is neither a nature of things to be respected nor pre-formed subjects to be maintained, you thereby admit that the individual may be sacrificable. Meaning that the individual is not independently endowed with any intrinsic nature that would deserve our striving to perpetuate it. (99; emphasis added)

You can observe the emergence of a link between the thesis that the subject is of the order not of what is but of what happens—of the order of the event—and the idea that the individual can be sacrificed to a historical cause that exceeds him. Since the being of the subject is the lack-of-being, it is only by dissolving itself into a project that exceeds him that an individual can hope to attain some subjective real. Thenceforth, the only “we” constructed in and by this project is the only thing that is truly real—subjectively real for the individual who supports it. The individual, truth be told, is nothing. The subject is the new man, emerging as the point of self-lack. The individual is thus, in its very essence, the nothing that must be dissolved into a we-subject. (100–101; emphasis added)

10. The only time in The Century in which Badiou relates the real to the two other Lacanian “registers,” he writes, “Either the twentieth century is the Real of that for which the nineteenth century was the Imaginary; or it is the Real of that for which the nineteenth was the Symbolic (i.e., what the nineteenth produced in terms of doctrine; what it thought and organized)” (19).

11. Unfortunately, there is no locus classicus in which Lacan would give a conclusive account of his notion of the Real. In fact, it very much evolves over time, from its initial appearance in the first two seminars to a more oblique presence in Seminar VII and further elaborations in Seminars XI and XX. For one of the most dramatic accounts see the discussion of Irma’s dream in Lacan, The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954–1955 (154–55, 164). On the idea of the Borromean knot see Lacan, On Feminine Sexuality, 133.


13. “Tarrying with the negative” is a Hegelian locution that provided the title for one of Žižek’s books in which he explores the links, as he does, in fact, in all his works, between German idealism and Lacanian psychoanalysis. See Žižek, Tarrying with the Negative.

14. “Man’s desire finds its meaning in the desire of the other, not so much because the other holds the key to the object desired, as because the first object of desire is to be recognized by the other” (Lacan, Écrits, 58). See also The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, 38, 115.

15. See, e.g., Lacan’s assertion that “desire is a metonymy” (Lacan, Écrits, 175). In the words of Slavoj Žižek, “desire is defined by this ce n’est pas ça: that is, its most elementary and ultimate aim is to sustain itself as desire, in its state of non-satisfaction” (Žižek, The Ticklish Subject, 297).


17. On sublimation see Lacan, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 87–164. For a very good discussion see Zupančič, Esthétique du désir, éthique de la jouissance, 43–58; and Zupančič, The Shortest Shadow, 73–85.

18. Žižek, The Ticklish Subject, 264. In an earlier formulation Žižek described the space between two deaths thus: “Ce lieu ‘entre deux morts’, lieu où apparaissent aussi bien la beauté sublime que les monstres effrayants, est celui de das Ding, l’objet-cause du désir, du noyau réel-traumatique au cœur du symbolique” (Žižek, Le plus sublime des hystériques, 232).

19. Žižek, The Abyss of Freedom, 80 (emphasis in the original).

20. “The century’s threshold of tolerance for that which, from the vantage point of our weary, pacified present, constitutes the worst, was incredibly high—
regardless of which camp one pledged allegiance to. This is obviously what leads some today to speak of the century’s ‘barbarity.’ Nevertheless, it is entirely unjust to isolate this dimension of the passion of the real” (Badiou, The Century, 63; emphasis added).

21. See Žižek, Le plus sublime des hystériques, 77–79.

22. Žižek, The Abyss of Freedom, 22.

23. “Le réel . . . c’est ce qui se retrouve toujours à la même place” (L’éthique de la psychanalyse, 85; The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 70).

24. This is to my mind one of the main thrusts in Santner’s latest work: the question of how what he calls our “undeadness” can be undone. See Santner, On Creaturely Life; and Santner, “Miracles Happen.”

25. See Badiou, The Century, 55–56 (“Nothing will have taken place but the place” [my translation]).

26. Pathos is a neglected category, at least in literary studies. The situation is a bit different in other areas of the humanities, such as theater, performance, and film studies.

27. See the entries on pathos in two recent encyclopedias: Ueding, Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik; and Barck, Fontius, et al., Ästhetische Grundbegriffe. See also the fine study by Dachselt, Pathos; and Bohrer, “Pathos im Zivilisationssprozeß.”

28. See Aristotle’s Rhetoric 1.2.1356a.


31. See Auerbach, “Passio als Leidenschaft”; reprinted as “Gloria passionis.” See also Gould, The Ancient Quarrel between Poetry and Philosophy, 63–69.


33. One of the most prominent representatives of this view in the German tradition is Friedrich Schiller: “Ein guter Geschmack . . . gestattet keine, wenn gleich noch so kraftvolle Darstellung des Affekts, die bloß physisches Leiden und physischen Widerstand ausdrückt, ohne zugleich die höhere Menschheit, die Gegenwart eines übersinnlichen Vermögens, sichtbar zu machen—und zwar . . . weil nie das Leiden an sich, nur der Widerstand gegen das Leiden pathetisch und der Darstellung würdig ist” (Schiller, “Über das Pathetische,” 429). [“Good taste permits no display of passion alone, however so powerful, if it only expresses physical suffering and physical resistance without at the same time making visible the nobler side of humanity, the presence of a capacity beyond the senses. The obvious reason for this . . . is the fact that only the resistance to suffering, never the
suffering in itself, is pathetic and deserves to be portrayed” (Schiller, On the Pa-
thetic, 50).] 34. As far as I have been able to determine, the first usage occurs in 1906 in
Warburg’s lecture “Dürer und die italienische Antike.” 35. “Wo irgend Pathos zum Vorschein kam, mußte es in antiker Form gesche-
hen” (Gombrich, Aby Warburg, 179n). For a more detailed discussion of the gen-
esis and structure of Warburg’s idea, see Settis, “Pathos und Ethos”; Port, “‘Katharsis
des Leidens’”; and Zumbusch, Wissenschaft in Bildern. 36. “Die Ausdrucksformen des maximalen inneren Ergriffenseins” (Warburg, 
Der Bilderatlas Mnemosyne, 3 [“Einleitung”]). 37. Gombrich, Aby Warburg, 296.

Chapter One: In Praise of Cruelty

2. See Brook, Bourgon, and Blue, Death by a Thousand Cuts.
4. Bataille’s engagement with the pictures has also given rise to a host of liter-
ary and artistic responses, notably in Latin America; see esp. Elizondo, Farabeuf
o la crónica de un instante; the image plays a more oblique role in Cortázar’s
Rayuela, in the novels of Mario Vargas Llosa, and in the fiction of Juan García
Ponce. On all of these writers see Ubilluz, Sacred Eroticism. The images have also
been discussed in the context of religious studies, mostly in connection with
Bataille; see, e.g., Connor, Georges Bataille and the Mysticism of Sin, 3–6, 161–
6. See Bois and Krauss, Formless; originally published as L’informe, the cata-
logue was intended as a “guide” to an exhibition mounted at the Centre Georges
Pompidou and curated by the two authors. Elkins’s other target is the work of
Didi-Huberman, notably his book on Bataille, La ressemblance informe ou le gai
savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 12, 14.
10. See Barthes, Camera Lucida.
11. Though not, at least in my judgment, of the Bataille who is at the center
of Krauss’s and Bois’s Formless or Didi-Huberman’s book on Bataille.
12. See Heindl, Meine Reise nach den Strafkolonien; see also Heindl’s “Stra-
frechstheorie und Praxis”; as well as his voluminous Der Berufsverbrecher. The
connection to Heindl has often elicited commentary. See, e.g., Müller-Seidel, *Die Deportation des Menschen*; Neumeyer, “‘Das Land der Paradoxa’ (Robert Heindl)”; and Kittler, “In dubio pro reo.”


14. See Bourgon, “Chinese Executions”; and Bourgon, “Agony by Proxy.” A much-expanded version of these two articles can be found in Brook, Bourgon, and Blue, *Death by a Thousand Cuts*, 152–242.


16. Ibid., 159. The author’s reference here is to Edgerton, *Pictures and Punishment*, 13. Bourgon’s other major sources are Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* and Spierenberg’s *The Spectacle of Suffering*. The number of studies on the cultural and legal history of executions (and torture) has grown continually since publication of Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* and was especially prolific during the last two decades of the twentieth century. See, e.g., Arasse, *La guillotine et l’imaginaire de la Terreur*; Dülmen, *Theater des Schreckens*; and Puppi, *Le splendore dei supplizi*. For the Middle Ages see Enders, *The Medieval Theater of Cruelty*.


19. Here is a slightly earlier description of the nexus between sacrifice and some kind of revelation: “A violent death disrupts the creature’s discontinuity; what remains, what the tense onlookers experience in the succeeding silence, is the continuity of all existence with which the victim is now one. Only a spectacular killing, carried out as the solemn and collective nature of religious dictates, has the power to reveal what normally escapes notice” (Bataille, *Erotism*, 22).


21. See the footnotes and the correspondence with the editor, J. M. Lo Duca, included in the book.


23. Bataille, *Guilty*, 35; *Œuvres complètes* 5:272; see also *Expérience intérieure*, 177–90. He did not reproduce any of the pictures, and the accounts are given in passing, so the pictures had a more covert presence back then.


28. “Thingness,” the differentiation of subjects and objects, is opposed to a presumed intimacy with the world; in *Erotism* this intimacy is called “continuity.” For “things” see especially Bataille, *Theory of Religion*.
30. Auffret, *Kojève*, 350–52. Bataille later said that Kojève’s seminar left him “rompu, broyé, tué dix fois: suffoqué et cloué” (broken, shattered, killed ten times over, suffocated and paralyzed) (ibid.).
37. See, e.g., Mladek, “‘Ein eigentümlicher Apparat.’” For a useful overview of different approaches to the story see Gray, “Disjunctive Signs”; see also Kittler, “Schreibmaschinen, Sprechmaschinen”; Pan, “Kafka as a Populist”; and Treichel, “Fleischwerdung der Schrift und Schriftwerdung des Leibes.” My own reading is indebted to these interpretations; however, unlike any of the interpretations of the story I know, the one attempted here will focus on the conjunction of spectacularity and specularity. The story projects a spectacle of death and transfiguration only to undo it; the “image” conjured up is displaced and refracted in the reflections and commentary it elicits.
38. See Kafka, *In der Strafkolonie*: “sollten noch kleine Unsicherheiten bestehen, so wird der Anblick der Exekution sie beseitigen” (231); and Corngold’s translation in Kafka, *In the Penal Colony*: “should some small uncertainties still remain, the sight of the execution will do away with them” (51). In subsequent citations in which I have juxtaposed the original German with Corngold’s English translation, I will use the abbreviations S and P respectively.
39. P, 49 (emphasis added). The officer continues: “It is effective even when it stands by itself in this valley.” (“Im übrigen [despite some minor technical problems] arbeitet die Maschine noch und wirkt für sich. Sie wirkt für sich, auch wenn sie allein in diesem Tal steht” [S, 227].) In an earlier instance the officer had finished his preparations by announcing, “from now on the machine works entirely on its own” (P, 36); “von jetzt an aber arbeitet der Apparat ganz allein” (S, 204–5).
der Angeklagte das Urteil,’ oder ‘Bei uns gibt es auch andere Strafen als Todesstrafen,’ oder ‘Bei uns gab es Folterungen nur im Mittelalter.’ Das alles sind Bemerkungen, die ebenso richtig sind, als sie Ihnen selbstverständlich erscheinen, unschuldige Bemerkungen, die mein Verfahren nicht antasten” (*S*, 229); “All these remarks are just as correct as they seem self-evident to you, innocent remarks that don’t invalidate my procedure” (*P*, 50).


42. Other prominent biblical motifs in the story are the illumination setting in at the sixth hour (Matt. 27:45); the twelve-hour martyrium of the condemned man; and his failure to keep watch by falling asleep (Mark 14:32). See Rohde, *Und blätterte ein wenig in der Bibel*, 76–105.

43. See S, 205; P, 37. “Completion,” which is how Corngold renders the term, is quite accurate given the immediate context of the term. In view of the broader context though—in other words, of the story as a whole—the other connotations impose themselves.


45. In reaction to the traveler’s question about whether the condemned man knows his sentence, the officer “paused for a moment as if demanding from the traveler a more cogent reason for his question” (*P*, 40). After answering in the negative to the traveler’s follow-up question about whether the condemned man “knows that he has been condemned,” the officer “smiled at the traveler, as if he now expected to have a few strange revelations from him.” His response to the traveler’s final question—“You mean that even now the man does not know how his defense was received?”—is given without looking at the traveler, as if to spare him the embarrassment of “telling him things that were so obvious to him” (*P*, 40).


47. For a more complex treatment of this aspect, from a postcolonial perspective, see Goebel, “Kafka and Postcolonial Critique”; and Müller-Seidel, *Die Deportation des Menschen*.

48. “Nun beginnt das Spiel” (*S*, 215). The semantic scope of *Spiel* is quite broad. Here it connotes “Schauspiel,” that is, “performance,” “show,” “drama,” but also “play” in the sense of the coordinated movements taking place between the “Bed” and the “Harrow.” *Spiel*, of course, also means “game.”

49. Chinese refers above all to a moment of disturbance in the perceived patterns of looking at and rationalizing pain in the West. For Kafka’s relation to China—“Im Grunde bin ich ja Chinese”—see Hsia, *Kafka and China*, 1 (for the remark about his own “Chineseness”); Goebel, *Constructing China*; and Zilcosky, *Kafka’s Travels*.

50. Discussing the “mediatic” character of Chinese executions, Bourgon writes,
“readability’: the execution is only the realisation of a legal message, stressing the equivalence between the ‘name’ of a crime and the ‘punishment’” (Bourgon, “Chinese Executions,” 168). A page later he adds, as though commenting on Kafka’s story: “no fellow-feeling is allowed to obscure the transparent message delivered by the state to the populace: ‘See justice being done, where the punishment fits the crime.’”

51. See Honold, “In der Strafkolonie.”

52. Santner, On Creaturely Life, 40.


54. Think of “Report for an Academy” but also “The Metamorphosis,” which is, of course, an inverted account of such humanization.

55. See, e.g., Kremer, Kafka.


57. On the tension between life and writing in Kafka and Flaubert see Kremer, Kafka, 118–52.

58. See Anderson, Kafka’s Clothes, 188. On the association of writing as a peculiar kind of death, at times ecstatic, at times prosaic, see also Corngold, Bent Traces, 81–94.

Chapter Two: Fragmentary Description of a Disaster

I would like to thank Hannah V. Eldridge, who has translated the first section of this chapter.

1. Da Vinci, Leonardo on Painting, 229–32.

2. Sebald, The Rings of Saturn, 124; subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text. The German suggests a slightly different image, especially in the way it describes the “mummers”: “Eine Zeitlang schaute ich diesen, wie es mir schien, vom ewigen Umgang getriebenen Gestalten nach, die bald zwischen den Häusern verschwanden, bald an einer anderen Stelle wieder hervorkamen” (Die Ringe des Saturn, 158).

3. “Das also, denkt man, indem man langsam im Kreis geht, ist die Kunst der Repräsentation der Geschichte. Sie beruht auf einer Fälschung der Perspektive. Wir, die Überlebenden, sehen alles von oben herunter, sehen alles zugleich und wissen dennoch nicht, wie es war” (Sebald, Die Ringe des Saturn, 157–58). A bit earlier the narrator had drawn similar conclusions apropos of some paintings of the Battle of Sole Bay: “Even celebrated painters . . . fail to convey any true impression of how it must have been to be on board one of these ships” (76–77).

4. Sebald, Austerlitz, 69; subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text.

5. “Wir alle, auch diejenigen, die meinen, selbst auf das Geringfügigste geachtet
zu haben, behelfen uns nur mit Versatzstücken, die von anderen schon oft genug auf der Bühne herumgeschoben worden sind. Wir versuchen, die Wirklichkeit wiederzugeben, aber je angestrengter wir es versuchen, desto mehr drängt sich uns das auf, was auf dem historischen Theater von jeher zu sehen war: der gefallene Trommler, der Infanterist, der gerade einen anderen niedersticht, das brechende Auge eines Pferdes, der unverwundbare Kaiser, umgeben von seinen Generalen, mitten in dem erstarrten Kampfgewühl. Unsere Beschäftigung mit der Geschichte, so habe Hilarys These gelaute, sei eine Beschäftigung mit immer schon vorgeformten Bildern, auf die wir andauernd starrten" (Austerlitz, 105).

Irrespective of his doubts about the credibility of war representations, Hilary concludes his depiction with yet another picture, both vivid and blurry, which he sees, as he stresses, as though through the eyes of somebody else:

Every attempt to understand the course of events inevitably turns into that one scene where the hosts of Russian and Austrian soldiers are fleeing on foot and horseback onto the frozen Satschen ponds. I see cannon-balls suspended for an eternity in the air, I see others crashing into the ice, I see the unfortunate victims flinging up their arms as they slide from the toppling floes, and I see them, strangely, not with my own eyes but with those of short-sighted Marshal Davout, who has made a forced march with his regiments from Vienna. (Austerlitz, 72)

[6. Sebald relates Stendhal’s remark in his own text about Beyle (see Sebald, Vertigo, 7–8).
7. See Prendergast, Napoleon and History Painting.
8. Badiou, The Century, 34 (italics in the original). The next paragraph continues, “The fundamental concepts through which the century has come to think of itself or its own creative energy have all been subordinated to the semantics of war.”
9. See Sebald, On the Natural History of Destruction. The German title of Notes to Pages 57–58 175]
the book, based on a series of lectures delivered in Zurich in 1997, is *Literatur und Luftkrieg* [*Literature and Aerial Warfare*].


11. The notable exception is Sebald’s own description of the bombing of Hamburg in his lectures on “Air War and Literature” (see *On the Natural History of Destruction*, 26–28). Claudia Öhlschläger has analyzed the passage and taken issue with Sebald, arguing that he is succumbing to the very kind of voyeurism and the false suggestion of “being there” for which he chastises some of the authors he discusses in his lectures. See Öhlschläger, *Beschädigtes Leben*, 193–202. For a different view of the same passage see Presner, “‘What a Synoptic and Artificial View Reveals.’” For a remarkable extension and revision of Sebald’s statements about the air war and the apparent failure to deal with it adequately see the accounts of the air raids by foreigners, authors and newspaper correspondents for the most part, who happened to be in Germany at the time. Their texts are anthologized in Lubrich, *Berichte aus der Abwurflzone*.


15. The term *roman fleuve* refers to the French tradition of multivolume novels, of which Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu*, one of Simon’s models and foils, is the most prominent representative in the twentieth century. Simon himself has designated many of his books as novels. In a very perceptive appreciation, the English translator of most of his work, the poet Richard Howard, has stressed the generic hybridity of Simon’s text. See Howard, “Divination by Ashes.” In the spirit of Howard’s observation the following readings will be deliberately selective; that is to say, they are less concerned with individual works than with specific techniques and effects operative in all of them.

16. I take the expression from the aptly titled interview with Jacqueline Piatier for *Le Monde des livres*, “Rendre la perception confuse multiple et simultanée du monde,” April 26, 1967, v. For Simon’s polemic against the nineteenth-century realist novel and its twentieth-century heirs see his “Nobel Lecture, December 9,
1985.” For the ostensible powerlessness of words (and language) see the preface to *Orion Aveugle*; as well as the programmatic “Fiction Word by Word.”

17. G, 209–10; Gé, 310–11 (“au fur et à mesure qu’il écrit son désarroi ne cessera de croître”).

18. Simon has often described the substratum of his own writing as a kind of “magma” of memories and sensations. See, e.g., the preface to *Orion Aveugle*.


20. See his essay “Fiction Word by Word,” where he notes that “there too [in the visual arts] it is not imitative verisimilitude that matters but a different kind of verisimilitude and credibility, in other words, pictorial credibility” (38) [ce n’est pas la vraisemblance imitative qui importe mais aussi une autre espèce de vraisemblance et de crédibilité, ... la crédibilité picturale (“La fiction mot à mot,” 81)]. See also Simon, “Réponses à quelque questions écrites de Ludovic Janvier,” 20; as well as Simon, “Nobel Lecture, December 9, 1985,” 68–69.

21. For the use of the term *permutation* to describe the dynamic of his texts see Simon, “Fiction Word by Word,” 46. The structure of *Le palace*, for instance, is said to follow the form of a spiral while *Leçon des choses*, as the writer came to realize in retrospect, turned out to be all about the idea of “chute,” of falling. (See Simon, “Roman, description et action,” 25; see also “The Crossing of the Image,” 55.) The three parts of *Triptyque* are meticulously organized according to a set of color schemes; so is *La route des Flandres*, whose ostensible disorder conceals the novel’s hidden plot symmetries. In *Les corps conducteurs* S-shaped forms and movements play a key role. In *La Bataille de Pharsale* a section titled “O” redescribes one of the book’s central episodes as a “system of relations” of different visual axes and viewpoints, an experiment that culminates in the invocation of the “mobile,” a kinetic sculpture that critics have identified as an image of the text itself: “we must represent the totality of the system as a moving body ceaselessly alternating around a few fixed points” (*BP*, 127) [“on doit se figurer l’ensemble du système comme un mobile se déformant sans cesse autour de quelques points fixes” (*BPh*, 186)].


24. His debt to the materialism and sensualism of *L’étranger* or *La nausée*
seems much greater than he cared to admit. See Duncan, “Simon and Sartre”; see also Simon, “Für wen schreibt denn Sartre?”

25. Unfortunately, the passages are too numerous to quote. Two examples will have to suffice: “ils s’envolèrent brusquement, comme une nuée de plumes, l’air au-dessus de la place tout entier pointillé pendant quelques instants par un palpité et neigeux rideau parcouru de remous, de courants multiples [. . .] et (du fait que le dessin du vol suivait une spirale montante puis descendante autour de l’esplanade) contraires, les centaines de taches claires et frémissantes s’entre- croisant en dents de peigne sur de plans différents [. . .], comme un rideau mouvant” (Le palace, 23); “l’épais plafond de fumée coagulée flottant comme un dais au-dessus des têtes de spectateurs, ondulant faiblement, parcouru par de lents remous sirupeux, se tordant et se dénouant avec une reptilienne paresse, ses écharpes traversées par le pinceau bleuâtre jailli de la cabine de projection et qui révélait ses lentes dérives, comme une sorte de laitance, de placenta, apparaissant et disparaissant dans l’oblique et pyramidale faisceau de lumière, rigide, multiple, changeant brusquement, passant de l’argent au gris, strié, se disvant, se brouillant, se scindant” (Gé, 211; cf. G, 144).

26. Several passages in Les Géorgiques are devoted to the same incident. See, for instance:

The brief skirmish at the ambush into which the squadron has fallen seems over. Everything is now quiet. After a moment he sees a mosaic of irregular polygons of different sizes, pale grey, blue grey, chalky, ochre and pink. He is on all fours on the ground. In the middle of the track, in the strip protected from the vehicle wheels, small tufts of grass and tiny plants with star-shaped serrated leaves grow between the stones. He can no longer hear the machine-guns firing. (G, 34–35; Gé, 51)

A subsequent attack is described in the following way:

It was then (then: whilst they were moving away) that the second bomb exploded—or the second cluster (still the impression of multiplicity because of the crackling, the secondary explosions which seemed to come from within the first), again behind and to the left, but this time very close to the road, so deafening that he thinks he has been hit, knocked by the blast no doubt, perceived as well (the blast) as a rapid succession of blows all over the body, like violent punches, at the same time as if blinded (unless he instinctively closed his eyes?): something obscure, brown, shattering into pieces, a rush of triangles, like infinite fragments of flying glass exploding (although it all takes place in the countryside with no house in the vicinity), the edges of the triangles luminous, dazzling, the noise (no longer that of the explosion but of what?) like the din of breaking glass whilst an odd smell of ether stings his nostrils. (G, 121–22; Gé, 177–78)
This kind of “jeux colorés” (Gé, 62; G, 42), the play of colored triangles and polygons, pervades the book (Gé, 37, 40, 42–44, 55–56, 177; G, 25, 27, 29, 37, 121–22); so does that of the sound of shattered glass (see in particular Gé, 177; G, 121–22). For an earlier treatment of the same episode see FR, 120–22; RF, 149–51.

27. Here is a description of the same phenomenon in Histoire: “quand le monde visible se sépare en quelque sorte de vous perdant ce visage familier et rassurant qu’il a (parce qu’en réalité on ne le regarde pas), prenant soudain un aspect inconnu vaguement effrayant, les objets cessant de s’identifier avec les symboles verbaux par quoi nous les possédons” (292). See also the Heidegger epigraph to the last part of La Bataille de Pharsale (BP, 129; BPh, 187); and Duffy, “Art as Defamiliarisation in the Theory and Practice of Claude Simon.”

28. Cf. also FR, 97, 231; RF, 121, 296.

29. Both La Bataille de Pharsale and La route des Flandres emphasize the importance of geography in their very titles. The battlefield that the narrator of La Bataille is looking for in Thessaly turns out to have been the venue of several battles, none of which the inhabitants of the area can identify with any certainty. The road of Flanders is better known as the “Spanish Road.” See Gould, Claude Simon’s Mythic Muse, 42n. Les Géorgiques is equally concerned with the sites of what the novel presents, in analogy to the seasons, as a sort of cyclical destruction; cf. G, 74, 107; Gé, 136, 447; and A, 24; Ac, 39 (more on this below).

30. See G, 85; Gé, 124.

31. “They too wearing those cast-off rags the colour of bile, of mud, as if a kind of corruption were covering them, corroding them, attacking them even as they stood, first their clothes, then spreading insidiously like the very color of war, of earth, gradually taking possession, their faces ashen, their rags muddy, their eyes muddy too, with that filthy, vague tinge that already seemed to assimilate them to this clay, this mud, this dust from which they had sprung and to which, wandering, abject, dazed and sad, they returned a little more each day” (FR, 129; RF, 162). For Georges’ later agony in the mud, in the “original matter (matrix),” see FR, 180–81; RF, 229–30; for the dead horse, in a state of decomposition, see FR, 23–26, 81, 179–80, 227; RF, 25–28, 99, 227–28, 290. Simon has spoken of the book as being the story of Georges’ death in an interview with Hubert Juin, Les lettres françaises, Oct. 6–12, 1960 (quoted after Dällenbach’s “Le tissu de la mémoire,” afterword to La route des Flandres [RF, 310]).

32. See also Gé, 102, 352. A passage in L’Acacia describes the loss of “all logic and all coherence” and the parallel assertion of “forces habitually concealed by some artifice (or in sleep, by pure indolence on their part) and resuming their imprescriptible rights, animated by their formidable ferocity at once blind, neg-

Notes to Pages 67–69 179
ligent, and summary, obeying the irrefutable logic, that irrefutable coherence proper to the elements and to natural laws” (A, 222; Ac, 294; see also A, 19; Ac, 33).

33. Shortly after realizing the need to go underground so as to avoid persecution by the Stalinist branch of the Republican forces, “O.” understands “that all problems, philosophical or other, were wiped out at a stroke, and even resolved, except one: running and hiding” (G, 180; Gé, 266; see also G, 215, 231; Gé, 318–19, 343). The mockery of bookish knowledge is also a major theme in La route des Flandres (see FR, 29–32, 99; RF, 33–35, 123, 209–10).

34. For the term art brut see Claude Simon’s letter to Jean Dubuffet, Sept. 6, 1981, in Dubuffet and Simon, Correspondance, 1970–1984, 32.

35. Not surprisingly, Simon’s “images” have been a major subject in the critical literature. It is impossible to do justice to the number of treatments—one could even say that, given their pervasiveness, all of Simon scholarship is, in one way or the other, about his images—but I would like to name the studies that have been crucial in shaping my own understanding of Simon’s univers imaginaire. They are, in particular, Mougin, L’effet d’image; Nitsch, Sprache und Gewalt bei Claude Simon; and Duffy, Reading between the Lines. See also Ferrato-Combe, Écrire en peintre; and Britton, Claude Simon.

36. A gifted draftsman, Simon wanted to be a painter himself and went to art school when he was young. Although he abandoned the idea in favor of literature, he would occasionally try his hand in other media, producing, most notably, some collages and a very interesting volume of photography, Photographies. See also his Album d’un amateur. For Simon’s relation to photography see Albers, Photographische Momente bei Claude Simon; and Ribaupierre, Le roman généalogique, esp. 47–125.

37. Simon, “Fiction Word by Word,” 43–44. Another poetological image conjured against the idea of narrative progression, from beginning to end, is that of the Blind Orion’s errance in the preface to Orion Aveugle.

38. Mitchell, Iconology, 10.

39. See Simon, “Roman et mémoire”: “ma perception (et par conséquent ma mémoire) se trouvent encombrées d’une multitude de ces ‘traductions codées’ qui, depuis mon enfance, sont venues la gauchir: est-il besoin d’énumérer, en désordre, les souvenirs des écritures saintes, de tableaux représentant leurs épisodes, des textes latins ou autres, que l’on m’a fait apprendre par cœur au collège, la mythologie antique, des figures et des raisonnements mathématiques, des images cinématographiques, etc., etc.” (191–92).

40. See, once more, the preface to Orion Aveugle.

41. Simon, The World about Us, 4. “La description (la composition) peut se continuer (ou être complétée) à peu près indéfiniment—merci beaucoup! selon la
minutie apportée à son exécution, l‘entraînement des métaphores proposées, l‘addition d‘autres objets visibles dans leur entier ou fragmentés par l‘usure, le temps, un choc...Leçon des choses, 10–11). For a more systematic reflection on this dynamic see my “Métaphores et métamorphoses chez Claude Simon.”

42. Mougin, L‘effet d‘image, passim. In addition Mougin, who is part of the research collective “Hubert de Phalèse,” has furnished us with an invaluable research tool, namely an index of Simon’s works that is accessible online (see www.cavi.univ-paris3.fr/phalese/csac.htm). Drawing on new information technologies, the same group of researchers has produced a comprehensive “code” of La route de Flandres (see Phalèse, Le code de “La route de Flandres”). Again, the combination of a statistical approach and microscopic readings on which the code is based is truly “eye-opening” with regard to the novel’s images.

43. The German linguist and critic Harald Weinrich aptly speaks of “Bild-Spanne,” elegantly spanning (!) both the tension and distance between the two terms; see the seminal article on the semantics of “audacious” metaphors, “Semantik kühner Metaphern.”

44. See Mougin, L‘effet d‘image, 43–64. On the “nonaudacious” character of Simon’s comparisons and their reliance on sensory resemblance see also Buuren, “L‘essence des choses.”

45. Deguy, “Claude Simon and Representation,” 67. Rossum-Guyon, in “La mise en spectacle chez Claude Simon,” states, “Le recours à la Mimésis II a chaque fois pour effet de renforcer Mimésis I suivant le principe que l‘Art est plus vrai que la vie” (90). She defines “Mimésis I” as “représentation directe de la réalité: la formule ‘Je croyais voir’ fonctionnant... comme une hypotypose motivant, sur le plan de la vraisemblance, l‘introduction d‘une description élaborée de telle manière que le lecteur a l‘impression de se trouver ‘devant la chose même’” and “Mimésis II” as “imitation de l‘art” (89).

46. Cf. FR, 104; RF, 129.

47. See Ferrato-Combe, Écrire en peintre, 117–29.


49. See, e.g., the “Waterloo” episode in Les Misérables: “Il y a des moments dans les batailles où l‘âme durcit l‘homme jusqu’à changer le soldat en statue, et où toute cette chair se fait granit” (Hugo, Les Misérables, 438).

50. The episode reappears in both Les Géorgiques (G, 65–68; Gé, 93–98) and L‘Acacia (A, 177–82; Ac, 237–43).

51. See G, 121–22; Gé, 177–78 (quoted at note 26 above).

52. See the special issue of Critique, no. 414, “La terre et la guerre dans l‘œuvre...
de Claude Simon” (Nov. 1981); Dällenbach, Claude Simon, esp. 135–39; and Schreckenberg, Im Acker der Geschichten.

53. On models of history as eternal recurrence (in Marx, Nietzsche, Blanqui, Benjamin, Klossowski, and Simon) see Hamel, “La poétique d’Orphée.”

54. On the comme si see Apeldoorn, “Comme si . . . figure d’écriture.” Apeldoorn sees in the comme si “une certaine fascination pour une causalité primitive, de l’ordre mécanique ou de l’ordre de puissances maléfiques” (21) and concludes: “C’est grâce à elle [la digression du ‘comme si’], pourrait-on dire, que l’auteur est libéré du poids de raconter et se voue à l’exploitation de ce qui le préoccupe fondamentalement: il nous livre ses pulsions archétypales” (32). See also Gleize, “Comme si c’était une fiction”; and Mougin, L’effet d’image, 113–44.

55. See, e.g., Jongeneel, “Movement into Space”; Rousset, “La guerre en peinture”; and Duffy, Reading between the Lines, 82–98. The paintings described are Piero della Francesca, Battle between Heraclius and Chosroes, c. 1466; Paolo Uccello, Battle of San Romano, c. 1435–55; Pieter Brueghel the Elder, Battle against the Philistines on the Gilboa, 1562; and Nicolas Poussin, Joshua’s Victory over the Amorites, 1625.

56. For an image of this strange amalgamation see above (p. 74).

57. See Kaempfer, Poétique du récit de guerre, 24–35. Kaempfer’s book is a study of La Bataille de Pharsale in relation to other war narratives, ancient (Cæsar, Lucan) and modern (Napoleon, Tolstoy, Céline, Cendrars, et al.). Kaempfer links the gruesome image of the spear (sword or arrow) hitting the soldier in the face with the punctum of the sniper’s bullet striking Reixach, as he is drawing his saber, a gesture as heroic as it is absurd. The notion of punctum was introduced by Roland Barthes in his book on photography, Camera Lucida.

58. The first part of La Bataille de Pharsale, “Achilles Running Motionless,” begins with the description of a bird’s shadow passing over someone’s face: “Yellow and then black in a wink of an eye then yellow again” (BP, 3; BPh, 9). As so often in Claude Simon, it sounds a number of motifs, all of which will resurface time and again in the novel. (Chief among them is the image of the arrow hitting the soldier straight in the face.) On the importance of Poussin see Duffy, Reading between the Lines, 197–247. One of the novelist’s most sustained elaborations of his poetics of errance and quest, blindness and sacrifice is inspired by, or rather developed apropos of, Poussin’s painting Blind Orion Searching for the Rising Sun (1658); see Simon, Orion Aveugle; see also Nitsch, Sprache und Gewalt bei Claude Simon, 1–33.

59. Apart from the authors of Roman antiquity already mentioned, Proust is a central reference throughout La Bataille de Pharsale, in particular his reflections on jealousy, which is at the center of the other type of “battle” the protago-
nist is engaged in. The Proust epigraph to the book’s second part, “Lexicon,” highlights the desire “to see”: “Je fixais avec attention devant mon esprit quelque image qui m’avait forcé à la regarder, un nuage, un triangle, un clocher, une fleur, un caillou, en sentant qu’il y avait peut-être sous ces signes quelque chose de tout autre que je devais tâcher de découvrir”; “I considered closely some image which had compelled my attention, a cloud, a triangle, a steeple, a flower, a pebble, feeling that perhaps beneath these signs there was something else I must try to discover” (BPh, 99; BP, 67). On the relation to Proust in La Bataille de Pharsale see Rossum-Guyon, “De Claude Simon à Proust”; on intertextuality more generally see Orr, Claude Simon.

60. BP, 127; BPh, 186; see also note 21 above.

61. See the fine commentary on La route des Flandres in the recent Pléiade edition of Simon’s works (Simon, Œuvres, 1274–1313, esp. 1293).

62. See Duffy, Reading between the Lines, 59–141.

63. “I was lying dead at the bottom of the ditch devoured by the ants my whole body slowly turning by a thousand tiny mutations into lifeless substance . . . nourishing the earth” (FR, 191; RF, 244); see also FR, 179–81; RF, 228–30, where Georges is comparing his own “slow transmutation” to that of the dead horse, which he sees again as he is cowering in the ditch, hiding from a German sentry.

64. See FR, 69, 120, 159, 212; RF, 83, 150–51, 202, 232.

65. On the last pages of Le jardin des plantes, Claude Simon’s penultimate novel, the author has recapitulated the fateful episode once more, capturing the scene as a kind of still, but this time from the sniper’s perspective: “Seen through the telescopic lens of the rifle (machine gun?), the four cavalymen approaching along the road, at a walk. Two thin black lines meet perpendicularly at the center, their intersection moves slowly from left to right and right to left over the group of cavalymen. A sudden glint of sunlight on the stripes of one of the riders’ sleeves. . . . The group of cavalymen is now very near. The intersection of the horizontal and vertical lines in the gun sight comes to rest on the chest of the leftmost officer. (Sound: the clattering of the hooves coming nearer, slight chirping of birds)” (Simon, The jardin des plantes, 285; cf. Simon, Le jardin des plantes, 374; see also 231).

Chapter Three: The Resistance to Pathos and the Pathos of Resistance

An earlier version of this chapter appeared as “The Resistance to Pathos and the Pathos of Resistance: Peter Weiss,” in Germanic Review 83, no. 3 (summer 2008): 241–66. I would like to thank the publisher for permission to reprint it here.

1. Weiss, Marat/Sade, 109–10; Die Verfolgung und Ermordung Jean Paul Marats dargestellt durch die Schauspielgruppe des Hospizes zu Charenton unter
Anleitung des Herrn de Sade, 132. The play was translated into English by Geoffrey Skelton, Robert Cohen, and Daniel Theisen.

2. The critical literature on David’s masterpiece from 1793 is abundant. The following observations are indebted to Träger, Der Tod des Marat, 63–70; Johnson, Jacques-Louis David, 95–120; Pankow, Brieflichkeit, 17–80; and Starobinski, 1789.


4. Apparently, the smile Corday had on her face as she mounted the scaffold persisted even after her decapitation, a fact that left spectators indignant. If this is true, then the allusive smile on Marat’s face would be his answer to his killer’s unrepentant attitude even in death. For an illustration of Corday’s smile see Pankow, Brieflichkeit, 70.

5. See Sontag, “Marat/Sade/Artaud.”
8. Ibid., 57, 100–101.
9. See Weiss, Vanishing Point, 195; Fluchtpunkt, 211.
10. Vanishing Point, 196; Fluchtpunkt, 212 (“Dein Schmerz ist eitel; Du bist die Erschütterung, die Dich überkommt, nicht wert”).
11. See Lessing, Laocoön, 16; Laokoon, 28.
14. “‘Laokoon oder über die Grenzen der Sprache’ argues for language against the image, yet at the same time it produces a set of images that will remain both defining and definitive” (Hell, “From Laokoon to Ge,” 26).
15. Weiss, The Investigation, 118; Die Ermittlung, 9 (“Bei der Aufführung
dieses Dramas soll nicht der Versuch unternommen werden, den Gerichtshof, vor
dem die Verhandlungen über das Lager geführt wurden, zu rekonstruieren. Eine
solche Rekonstruktion erscheint dem Schreiber des Dramas ebenso unmöglich, wie
es die Darstellung des Lagers auf der Bühne wäre”). In parenthetical citations in
the text proper, I will distinguish between the English and German titles by using
the following abbreviations: I (The Investigation); E (Die Ermittlung).

17. See Young, Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust, 69–79.
war und der ich entkam”).
nicht mehr” (“Meine Ortschaft,” 118).
21. Even some of the most skeptical critics of the novel singled out this episode
as a remarkable achievement. Ferenc Fehér, for example, writes that it is “beyond
any doubt one of the greatest chapters of modern German prose” (Fehér, “The
Swan Song of German Khrushchevism,” 160).
die Falte, jeden Riß, jede blutunterlaufene Beule in den Gesichtern, und die
Abschürfungen, die tiefen runden Verbrennungsmale, die verschorften oder eitern-
den Wunden an den Oberkörpern”). Quotes from the first volume of Die Ästhetik des Widerstands are from Joachim Neugroschel’s translation, The Aesthetics of Resistance; subsequent citations of each will be given in the text using the abbreviations AW and AR for the translation of the first volume respectively; all other
translations from volumes 2 and 3 of AW are my own.
23. For a more detailed account of these references see Müller, Haltlose Reflexion, 168–69; and Wiethölter, “Mnemosyne” oder ‘Die Höllenfahrt der Erinnerung,’” 240–41.
24. See 3:214, which invokes, if only in passing, three famous representatives
of that tradition: Tilman Riemen Schneider, Veit Stoß, and Jörg Ratgeb.
25. Weiss’s account is, in fact, based on Poelchau, Die letzten Stunden. The
pastor’s memoirs consist largely of brief characterizations of the people he ac-
companied during their last hours and of excerpts from their farewell letters. Weiss
has integrated some of this material. His depiction of Poelchau’s own thoughts and
feelings is fictional though.
26. The name is probably no coincidence. There is also a figure named Schwarz in The Investigation, accompanied by an assistant named Weiß. And like their
counterparts in the novel they are involved in “administering” death. See Weiss,
Die Ermittlung, 154.
27. See, e.g., Lindner, “Anästhesie.”

28. For a complete catalogue of all the artworks invoked in the novel see Badenberg, “Kommentiertes Verzeichnis der in der ‘Ästhetik des Widerstands’ erwähnten Künstler und Kunstwerke.”

29. Succinctly put, the chorus of voices replaces the omniscient narrator; the collective cast of the novel replaces individual characters; discussion replaces plot; development and progress are replaced by structures of repetition. In the words of one commentator: “Die Grundbewegung des Romans ist . . . nicht die des Sukzessiven, sondern des Iterativen” (Rector, “Örtlichkeit und Phantasie,” 113).

30. For a discussion of the novel’s apparent polyphony see Fehér, “The Swan Song of German Khrushchevism”; and Butzer, “Erinnerung als Diskurs der Vergegenwärtigung in Peter Weiss’ Die Ästhetik des Widerstands.”

31. One example among many, summing up a discussion about the representation of working class figures from Mantegna to Vermeer and Chardin: “Once the historically determined hierarchies, the proportions of a specific era were exposed, we were confronted with a permanent image of reality, and we could discern to what extent the artist had prepared the future development and what stance he had taken on the suppression carried from century to century” (AR, 73, cf. also 300). [“Waren die historisch bedingten Ordnungen, die Größenverhältnisse einer bestimmten Zeit einmal bloßgelegt worden, so trat uns ein dauerhaftes Wirklichkeitsbild entgegen, und es ließ sich ausmachen, in welchem Grad der Künstler die zukünftige Entwicklung vorbereitet und welche Haltung er gegenüber der von Jahrhundert zu Jahrhundert getragenen Unterdrückung eingenommen hatte” (AW, 1:86, cf. also 341).]

32. For a critical discussion of this issue see Koch, “Das angestrengte Beharren auf Gesinnungs-Kompromissen und die heimliche Hoffnung des Peter Weiss.”

33. See Eitner, Géricault, 190; and Heinrich, Floß der Medusa, 16.

34. See Heinrich, Floß der Medusa, 16.

35. The fascination with Géricault is, above all, a fascination with the artist’s attempt to reimagine the despair and the horrors on the raft. But in this reconstruction he goes too far and comes close to losing his sanity. According to some visitors of his studio, Géricault surrounded himself with body parts from the morgue so as better to render the complexion of the corpses.

36. “We looked back at a prehistoric past, and for an instant the prospect of the future likewise filled up with a massacre impenetrable to the thought of liberation” (AR, 9); “Wir blickten in eine Vorzeit zurück, und einen Augenblick lang füllte sich auch die Perspektive des Kommenden mit einem Massaker, das sich vom Gedanken an Befreiung nicht durchdringen ließ” (AW, 1:14).

37. See, e.g., AR, 71; AW, 1:83.

38. The belief in the unity of their efforts, though perhaps illusory, cannot do
“without the contempt for individual death, without the belief in a path taken by many and that included collective death” [“ohne die Verachtung des individuellen Tods, ohne den Glauben an einen Weg, der von vielen beschritten wird und zu dem eben auch der gemeinsame Tod gehört” (AW, 3:228)].

39. “War nicht die Geschichte der Menschheit eine Geschichte des Mordens, waren Menschen nicht seit jeher ... zu Hunderttausenden, zu Millionen versklavt, abgeschlachtet worden.”

40. See, e.g., AR, 281–90 (esp. 289–90); AW, 1:320–30 (esp. 329–30), which recapitulates the invasions and struggles around the city of Denia, from its beginnings as a Greek settlement called Hemeroskopeion, to the present of the narrative. For another example see AW, 3:47–48. There is a remarkable similarity between these telescopic flashbacks, cutting through the centuries, and the ekphrastic descriptions. Both achieve their primary effect of compression and a sense of urgency by means of enumeration and accumulation.

41. See AR, 253–76; AW, 1:288–314. The voice of dissent is that of one Marcauer, who is later arrested and, presumably, executed. The section ends with Marcauer’s memories of the terrified gaze of the people facing the firing squad on Goya’s El tres de mayo. The narrator expresses his regret over her disappearance but very explicitly refrains from further pursuing the issue.

42. “Trauer würde mich überkommen, wenn ich ihrer gedächte, Tag und Nacht würde ... ich ihre Kraft genommen habe zu ihrem Mut und zu ihrer Ausdauer, und die einzige Erklärung würde nur diese bebende, zähe, kühne Hoffnung sein, wie es sie auch weiterhin in allen Kerkern gibt.”

Chapter Four: Medeamachine

A part of this chapter has been published previously as “‘Death to the Enemies of the Revolution!’ Heiner Müller’s Versuchsreihe,” Telos 144 (fall 2008): 52–65. I would like to thank the publisher for permission to reprint it here.


2. See Berndt, “oder alles ist anders.”


4. See Müller, Krieg ohne Schlacht, 342–43.

5. “Der wesentliche Effekt, den Müller erzielt, besteht in der völligen Kontingenz des Textes” (Berndt, “oder alles ist anders,” 301). The author himself has stressed the arbitrary character of the action in an endnote to his text: “Die Handlung ist beliebig” (see Müller, Bildbeschreibung, 14). In the words of Manfred
Schneider: the text is “infected” with contingency (Schneider, “Im Namen des Bildes”).

6. Müller, Explosion of a Memory, 137–38.
7. Ibid., 138.
8. See Bonnaud, “The Invasion of the Body Snatchers.” For more on the connection to The Birds see Vogl, “Gefeder, Gewölk.”
10. Müller, “Luckless Angel”; see also Müller, “Der glücklose Engel.”
11. See Primavesi, “Heiner Müllers Theater der Grausamkeit.”
12. “Töten, mit Demut, das ist der theologische Glutkern des Terrorismus” (Müller, Krieg ohne Schlacht, 316). (To kill, with humility, that is the theological fervor at the core of terrorism.)
13. See Matt, Verkommene Söhne, mißratene Töchter, 96–100.
14. This view was first presented in one of the earliest articles on the play by the Brecht expert Werner Mittenzwei, “Eine alte Fabel, neu erzählt.” See also the discussion published in Sinn und Form in 1966 between Mittenzwei, Müller, and Wilhelm Girnus, “Gespräch mit Heiner Müller,” 143–46.
15. See Kraus, “Heiner Müller und die griechische Tragödie”; see also Huller, Griechisches Theater in Deutschland, 46–102, esp. 71–79.
16. The Horatian, 108. Cf. Der Horatier:

Und der Horatier, im Arm noch den Schwertschwung
Mit dem er getötet hatte den Kuriatier
Um den seine Schwester weinte jetzt
Stieß das Schwert, auf dem das Blut des Beweinten
Noch nicht getrocknet war
In die Brust der Weinenden
Daß das Blut auf die Erde fiel. Er sagte:
Geh zu ihm, den Du mehr liebst als Rom. (46)

17. The episode is in book 2, part 5, chapter 20; see Sholokhov, And Quiet Flows the Don, 567–71.
18. In a commemorative article the public persona Heiner Müller was remembered as “ein Panzer aus Pointen, Zynismus und Zitaten” (Peter Laudenbach, “Heiner Müller privat,” Der Tagesspiegel [Berlin], July 10, 2005). See also the three volumes of interviews published as Gesammelte Irrtümer.
19. Lessing, Laocoön, 24; cf. Lessing, Laokoon, 36. For the remark on pity as the sole aim of the tragic stage see Lessing, Laocoön, 29; Laokoon, 45.
20. Lessing, Laocoön, 126 (Lessing is, in fact, quoting his friend Moses
Mendelssohn here). “Die Empfindungen des Ekels sind also allezeit Natur, niemals Nachahmung” (Laokoon, 169). See also Menninghaus, Disgust, esp. chaps. 1 and 2; and Wellbery, “Das Gesetz der Schönheit.”

21. Lessing, Laocoön, 28–29; Laokoon, 44.
22. See Schneider, “Kunst in der Postnarkose.”
24. “Weil er nicht lügen will, muß er töten” (Müller, Geschichten aus der Produktion, 145).
25. See Emmerich, “Der vernünftige, der schreckliche Mythos”; see also Horkheimer and Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment, 35–62.
26. Müller, “Brief an den Regisseur der bulgarischen Erstaufführung von Philoktet.” For other prominent statements on the play see especially Müller, Rotwelsch and Müller, Krieg ohne Schlacht.
28. Christoph Menke has spelled out the implications of Müller’s passing references to Hegel. He argues that Philoctetes and Odysseus represent two modes of reflexivity (as opposed to Neoptolemos’s putative wholeness and “plasticity”) that, instead of overcoming the tragic conflict, exacerbate the clash between the political claims of the city and the existential claims of the individual. See Menke, Die Gegenwart der Tragödie, 203–14; Tragic Play, 167–78.
29. “In diesem Handel bist du nicht der erste / Der was er nicht will tut” (Müller, Philoktet, 13).
31. “Macher und Liquidator der Tragödie” (ibid.).
32. “Odysseus der Pragmatiker das Werkzeug” (ibid., 105).
34. Der Horatier, 47; The Horatian, 110 (“between laurel and ax”).
35. For more on the relation to the play’s “intertexts” see Klaus-Detlef Müller, “Nämlich die Worte müssen rein bleiben.” On Corneille’s Horace see Fumaroli, “La tragédie de la cité terrestre dans Horace.” On the relation between The Horatian and Brecht’s learning play see Silberman, “Heiner Müllers Fortschreibung der Brechtschen Dialektik.”
And the laurel bearer said:
His merit cancels his guilt
And the sword bearer said:
His guilt cancels his merit
And the laurel bearer asked:
Shall the conqueror be executed?
And the sword bearer asked:
Shall the murderer be honored? (Müller, The Horatian, 111)

[Müller, The Horatian, 111]

And the laurel bearer said:
Un und der Lorbeerträger sagte:
Sein Verdienst löscht seine Schuld
Und der Beilträger sagte:
Seine Schuld löscht sein Verdienst
Und der Lorbeerträger fragte:
Soll der Sieger gerichtet werden?
Und der Beilträger fragte:
Soll der Mörder geehrt werden? (Der Horatier, 49)

Und der Lorbeerträger sagte:
Sein Verdienst löscht seine Schuld
Und der Beilträger sagte:
Seine Schuld löscht sein Verdienst
Und der Lorbeerträger fragte:
Soll der Sieger gerichtet werden?
Und der Beilträger fragte:
Soll der Mörder geehrt werden? (Der Horatier, 49)

37. The Horatian, 114; Der Horatier, 53.

38. The Horatian, 114 (“Tödlich dem Menschen ist das Unkenntliche” [Der Horatier, 53]).

39. The Horatian, 114 (“Nämlich die Worte müssen rein bleiben” [Der Horatier, 53]).

40. The Horatian, 114 (“nicht verbergend den Rest / Der nicht aufging im unaufhaltsamen Wandel” [Der Horatier, 53]).

41. Müller, Mauser, 57 (“We said: It’s work like any other work” / / / “And it was work unlike any other work” [Mauser, in The Battle, passim]).

42. Mauser, in The Battle, 129, 130.

43. Müller, The Battle, 134 (“Die Stadt Witebsk steht für alle Orte, an denen eine Revolution gezwungen war ist sein wird, ihre Feinde zu töten” [Mauser, 69]).

44. Mauser, in The Battle, 134 (“Wer bist du andrer als wir” [Mauser, 62]).

45. Mauser, in The Battle, 125 (“Die Revolution selbst / Ist nicht eins mit sich selber” [Mauser, 59]).

46. Mauser, in The Battle, 128 (“Vor meinem Revolver ein Mensch” [Mauser, 62]).

47. Mauser, in The Battle, 133 (“DAMIT ETWAS KOMMT MUSS ETWAS GEHEN
DIE ERSTE GESTALT DER HOFFNUNG IST DIE FURCHT DIE ERSTE GESTALT DES NEUEN IST DER SCHRECKEN” [Mauser, 68–69 (capitalized in the original)]).

[Wissend, das tägliche Brot der Revolution
Ist der Tod ihrer Feinde, wissend, das Gras noch
Müssen wir ausreißen, damit es grün bleibt. (Mauser, 55)]

49. Mauser, in The Battle, 129; cf. Mauser, 64.


51. See Müller, “Brief an den Regisseur der bulgarischen Erstaufführung von Philoktet,” 105. Müller uses the expression in a commentary on Odysseus, the least likely of the three protagonists (or rather antagonists) of Philoktet to elicit our sympathies, let alone our admiration, but the one who is supposed to announce a new kind of political subject.

52. “Die christliche Endzeit der Maßnahme ist abgelaufen” (Mauser, 85).

53. Müller, Waterfront Wasteland Medea Material Landscape with Argonauts, 50. Cf. Verkommenes Ufer Medeamaterial Landschaft mit Argonauten:

Mein Eigentum die Bilder der Erschlagen
Die Schreie der Geschundnen mein Besitz
Seit ich aus Kolchis auszog meiner Heimat
Auf Deiner Blutspur Blut aus meinesgleichen. (94)

54. “Das Bild: der verwundete Mensch, der in der Zeitlupe seine Verbände sich abreißt, dem im Zeitraffer die Verbände wieder angelegt werden usw. ad infinitum” (Müller, Wolokolamsker Chaussee, 149).


56. The titles themselves underscore the episodic and serial character of these works: Hamletmachine (1977), Waterfront Wasteland Medea Material Landscape with Argonauts (1982), Life of Gundling Frederick of Prussia Lessing Sleep Dream Scream (1976). On the notion of postdramatic theater see Lehmann, Postdramatic Theater.

57. See Müller, “Kopftheater,” 108. Many critics have stressed the imagistic quality of the postdramatic works. Apropos of Hamletmaschine Uwe Wittstock speaks of cascades of images [“erdrückende Bild-Katarakte”] (see “Nachwort,” in
Müller, Der Auftrag und andere Revolutionsstücke); Heinrich Vormweg has characterized the play as an orgy of images [“geradezu eine Bilderorgie”] (see Vormweg, “Sprache—die Heimat der Bilder,” 21).

58. Der Lohndrücker, Der Horatier, and Kentauren in 1988; Hamlet / Maschine in 1990; Mauser, Herakles 2, Quartett, and Der Findling in 1991 (all at Deutsches Theater Berlin); Duell Traktor Fatzer in 1993 (at the Berliner Ensemble). For critical literature on some of the productions see especially Barnett, Literature versus Theatre; as well as Keim, Theatralität in den späten Dramen Heiner Müllers; for documentation of some of Müller’s work as a director of his own plays see Linzer and Ullrich, Regie Heiner Müller.


60. Müller, Verkommenes Ufer Medeamaterial Landschaft mit Argonauten, 92 (capitalized in the original); English translation quoted from Müller, Theatremachine, 48.

61. Tractor, in Müller, The Battle, 61; for the poem see ABC in Müller, Explosion of a Memory, 57.


64. Žižek, The Fragile Absolute, 173n99. See also Schulz, “Medea”; and Domdey, Produktivkraft Tod, 305–6.

65. Domdey, Produktivkraft Tod, 305–6.

66. One of the best accounts of Hamletmaschine remains the chapter by Lehmann and Schulz in the first monograph on the playwright; see Schulz, Heiner Müller.

67. Müller, Hamletmachine, 91; Hamletmaschine, 93. The imagery of petrification, stasis, and paralysis, so typical of the later work, usually carries negative connotations. In one instance, though, it is suggested that the utopian promise needs to be buried in order to be saved, like a message in a bottle for future generations. See Lehmann, “Leben der Steine.”

68. Hamletmachine, 91; Hamletmaschine, 93–94.

69. Hamletmachine, 91–92 (translation slightly altered). Cf.:

leer unter dem Helm, der erstickte Schrei unter den Ketten. . . Ich knüpe
die Schlinge, wenn die Rädelsführer aufgehängt werden, ziehe den
Schemel weg, breche mein Genick. Ich bin mein Gefangener. . . Meine
Rollen sind Speichl und Spucknapf Messer und Wunde Zahn und Gurgel
Hals und Strick. . . Blutend in der Menge. Aufatmend hinter der
Flügeltür.” (Hamletmaschine, 94–95)

70. “Mein Ekel / Ist ein Privileg” (Hamletmaschine, 96). It is in his caricatures of
Western consumer culture that the author’s cultural conservatism is most evident.

71. Hamletmachine, 89; Hamletmaschine, 91.

72. Hamletmachine, 94; Hamletmaschine, 97 (“Es lebe der Haß, die Verachtung,
der Aufstand, der Tod”). The slogan recalls that of the Falange—“¡Viva la muerte!”
(Long live death!)—but also the more recent appropriations of the same idea by
Islamic suicide terrorists: “You love life; we love death!” Heiner Müller’s flirta-
tion with terrorism doesn’t exactly come as a surprise: “Töten, mit Demut, das ist
der theologische Glutkern des Terrorismus” (Krieg ohne Schlacht, 316). See note
12 above.

73. “Die Instanz, auf die hin Handlung in Gang gesetzt, das Opfer gebracht,
die Argumentation ausgerichtet wird, bleibt leer. Sie heißt ‘Krieg’ und ist der
abwesende, als fraglose condition gesetzte Ausgangs- und Endpunkt der Fabel”
(Schulz, “Gelächter aus toten Bäuchen,” 765).

74. Hölderlin, Poems and Fragments, 586–87 (translation modified). Cf.:

Und vieles
Wie auf den Schultern eine
Last von Scheitern ist
Zu behalten. (Hölderlin, “Mnemosyne,” 199)

See also Müller, Rotwelsch, 88.

75. In recent years Slavoj Žižek has advocated a similar form of violence, one
that consists above all in undoing the ties that bind us to the symbolic order. The
paradigmatic example of this is not so much Antigone as Medea (see Žižek, “Af-
erword,” 223).

76. Müller, Explosion of a Memory, 132; Bildbeschreibung, 14.

Epilogue

1. The “idiocy” of the real is the dimension elaborated by Clément Rosset,
whose many books on this issue seem to have had virtually no impact on the psy-
choanalytic accounts of the real. At the same time, Rosset himself does not seem
particularly interested in the alternatives to his engagement with the subject. See
Rosset, Le réel; and Rosset, L’école de réel.

Notes to Pages 142–146
2. In a conversation with Peter Hallward, Badiou characterized the real “as being, in a situation, in any given symbolic field, the point of impasse, or the point of impossibility, which precisely allows us to think the situation as a whole, according to its real” (Badiou, “Politics and Philosophy,” 121). He adds that “emancipatory politics always consists in making seem possible precisely that which, from within the situation, is declared to be impossible.”

3. Even though this is not spelled out in *The Century*, in many respects the real must be regarded as another name for one of the central categories of Badiou’s thought, that of the event, and in this regard it is hardly surprising that it is such an emphatic notion. Associated as it is with the ideas of urgency, suddenness, and violence, the real is mobilized as a kind of *antidote* against the culture of spectacle and superficiality that, in Badiou’s eyes, marks our social and political present.


5. See, e.g., Hammer, *Bacon and Sutherland*; and Fischer, *Vis-à-vis*.

6. Seipel, Steffen, and Vitali, *Francis Bacon und die Bildtradition*. Bacon has further emphasized the continuity between his works and the tradition by insisting that his paintings be framed in gold.

7. This material has now been catalogued and documented. See Cappock, *Francis Bacon’s Studio*; Harrison and Daniels, *Francis Bacon*; and Harrison, *In camera, Francis Bacon*.

8. Other examples include Second Version of “Painting 1946” (1974) or the 1988 version of *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion*, from 1944. Many of the triptychs can be regarded as reworkings of earlier attempts at the same themes. I am thinking in particular of the triptychs commemorating George Dyer and his squalid death (see *Triptych, August 1972*, as well as *Triptych, May–June 1973*).

9. “It’s a magnificent armature on which you can hang all types of feeling and sensation” (Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact*, 44). In a later passage he added that the crucifixion does not only interest him as a technical device but in terms of its “poignancy” (ibid., 83).

10. *Le mal du siècle* is invoked in Leiris, *Francis Bacon, Full Face and in Profile*, 19. For a very forceful argument against generalities of this sort, rather common in the critical literature, see Werckmeister, *Citadel Culture*, 70–93, esp. 86–91. (This criticism is leveled specifically against Wieland Schmied’s *Francis Bacon: Commitment and Conflict.*) Werckmeister is also skeptical of the artist’s own prioritizing of form over content, which downplays what he sees as the central obsession of Bacon’s work: the suicides of his two companions, Peter Lacey (d. 1962) and George Dyer (1934–71). For another critical and, indeed, polemical assessment of Bacon see Berger, “Bacon and Disney.”
11. Bacon’s appeal to sensation is the basis for Gilles Deleuze’s important study of the painter, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*.
12. “When talking about the violence of paint, it’s nothing to do with the violence of war. It’s to do with an attempt to remake the violence of reality itself” (Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact*, 81).
13. Ibid., 46.
17. Ibid., 179.
20. The paintings seem to feature affects without a subject, as one might put it in view of Deleuze’s later writings on aesthetics. See, e.g., Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* 164.
22. See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*.
23. The character on the painting is itself a bit bull-like, a bulk of a man, who has reminded some critics of twentieth-century dictators, in particular of Mussolini.
25. The magisterial study by Deleuze, undoubtedly the most sustained effort to think about Bacon’s work along the lines suggested by the artist himself, stressing questions of formal organization, materiality, and the appeal to sensation, is a case in point. By Deleuze’s account, the disturbing mutations effected by these paintings do not at all pertain to the order of human drama and the tragic, or the order, as he puts it, of the spectacle. In some sense, wanting to look at Bacon in terms of agency, purpose, or intentionality is starting in the wrong place. Rather than being concerned with questions of meaning, psychology, or what he calls the “figurative,” Deleuze views the paintings as being invested in capturing invisible processes, forces, and rhythms, elements of a vitalistic ontology, which forms the underlying premise of his study but is not elaborated in the book itself. See Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 31–38 (on sensation), 48–54 (on forces), 60–70 (on rhythms), and passim. On the ontological underpinnings of Deleuze’s aesthetics see Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* 163–99.
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