BODIES UNBURIED

SUBVERSIVE CORPSES AND THE AUTHORITY OF THE DEAD

James R. Martel

Public Works

from THE AMHERST COLLEGE PRESS

BODIES UNBURIED

SUBVERSIVE CORPSES AND THE AUTHORITY OF THE DEAD

James R. Martel



AUSTIN D. SARAT *Series Editor*

Conceived as a "digital pamphlet" series, titles in *Public Works* seek out and make available to a wide audience of readers the perspectives of leading scholars in the humanities on questions rising to significance in our public conversation and demanding more discerning examination and penetrating insight. Shorter than monographs, these works offer both authors and readers the freedom of long-form essays and the tools of digital media to see through the lens of the human experience the seemingly intractable questions confronting a complex, deeply interconnected, and sometimes shockingly violent world.

Essays published in *Public Works* series are available as open-access works of scholarship, immediately and freely available to readers and thinkers everywhere. As digital works, they will be published to the web and also downloadable to a variety of reading devices.

UNBURIED BODIES

Published by The Amherst College Press
Robert Frost Library • Amherst, Massachusetts

This work copyright © 2018 by James R. Martel

All materials herein released on a
Creative Commons 4.0 CC-BY-NC-ND License.



You may copy, share, and redistribute this work, under the following conditions:

- You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made.
- You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.
- You may not use the material for commercial purposes.
- If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you may not distribute the modified material.
- You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

For more information: http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

ISBN 978-1-943208-10-4 paperback
ISBN 978-1-943208-11-1 electronic book

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018938616



The manuscript of this work was peer reviewed in a double-blind process prior to publication.

if i leave this earth today atleast youll know i care
about others more than i cared about my damn self.
—Michael Brown, Facebook post

Go on call me "demon" but I WILL love my *damn self.*
—Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's imagined response
in "Michael Brown," *boundary 2* 42, no. 4 (2015): 84

Contents

Acknowledgments vii

Preface ix

Introduction: When the State Kills, It Is (Also) Killing Itself 1

Chapter One: The Disenchanted Corpse 13

Chapter Two: Classical Readings of the Unburied Body 43

Chapter Three: Early Modern and Modern Renditions of the Unburied Dead 66

Chapter Four: Unburied Bodies of Color 99

Conclusion: The Authority of the Dead 137

Acknowledgments

This book would not have happened without two people. First, Austin Sarat, to whom I owe the greater part of my career, and then Mark Edington, whose initial query to me I grotesquely misread with happy consequences. I am also grateful to many people who read or responded to various presentations of parts of this book. I first presented the book at the Kent Summer School in Paris in the summer of 2016 (with particular thanks to Maria Drakapoulou and Connal Parsley and my brilliant and wonderful students there, to whom I must add Alex Dione as an honorary member). I also presented a version of it at Goldsmiths College, London, in the fall of 2017 (with special thanks to Julia Ng, Andrew Benjamin, Alberto Toscano, Saul Newman, and Lucy Benjamin). I also want to thank Iben Engelhardt Andersen, who was writing her own work on Antigone and Michael Brown called *Tragic Teenagers*. In addition, I taught the texts for this book to two other classes: first a politics and literature class at San Francisco State in fall 2017 (for which I would like to especially thank Marcelle French) and also a summer course at Southern Cross University Law School on the Byron Bay campus in New South Wales, Australia, called "Why the State Needs to Kill: Law, Violence and the Production of Political Authority," with great thanks to Bill MacNeil, Helen Walsh, and Jodi Dean.

Mark Edington has been a wonderful editor, and I am extremely grateful to the two anonymous reviewers, both of whom gave excellent, pointed, and extremely valuable commentary. Thanks also to Amanda Karby for her work on editing the book. I am also grateful to Linette Park for her comments that came just in time for me to rethink a few key issues. Others who have helped me think about these issues include Kate Gordy, Laura Harrington, Bonnie Honig, Martha

Umphrey, Aaron Belkin, Masumi Matsumoto, Charles Barbour, Miguel Vatter, Mauricio Oportus Preller, Daniela Gandorfer, Kirill Chepurin, Başak Ertür, Julia Ng, Annmaria Shimabuku, Burgess, Sam Frost, Christina Tarnopolsky, Banu Bargu, Jess Whyte, Zach Reyna, Sam McCormick, Jodi Dean, Kathleen O'Neal, Ira Allen, Diego Arrocha, Alex Dubilet, and many others as well.

Finally, as always, I am grateful to my wonderful and extensive family: my husband, Carlos; my children Jacques and Rocio; coparents Nina and Kathryn; the uncles Elic and Mark; my mother, Huguette; my father, Ralph; my brother, Django; my sister-in-law Shalini; and my nephew, Shaan. This book is dedicated to the memory of my dear friend Nasser Hussain and my equally dear sister-in-law Betty Segui, as well as my beloved uncle, Maurice Failevic, all sadly departed.

Preface

I never really intended to write a book about dead and unburied bodies. I am far more suited personally to exactly what burial inaugurates: continuity, closure, acceptance—along with a healthy dose of denial—and moving on with life. In the two years that I have been writing this book, however, I have lost several people that I was very close to and, as it happened, saw two of them when they were dead at their funerals. The strangeness and intimacy of such an experience is not something I want to discuss further, but it has definitely colored this book, and I feel haunted and guided by my connection to these people, both when they were dead and when they were alive.

I have always been one of those people who have been terrified of death, so I don't undertake a conversation about dead bodies—and unburied, brutalized ones at that—lightly. When I talk in this book about the power that the dead body has over us, about giving ourselves over to the authority of the dead, to the subversive power of the corpse, I am not thinking in purely theoretical terms. I know that the dead body has a huge effect on us, but what I am trying to interpret in this book is what that effect actually is: why the corpse is so disturbing but also so moving, why it affects us as little else does, and how to think of that effect in terms that have major political resonance.

Seeing both my beloved friend Nasser Hussain and my equally beloved sister-in-law Betty Segui suffering and dying in the space of little over a year has taught me something (and since then, I have also lost my beloved uncle, Maurice Failevic). It has taught me not so much to appreciate life as to appreciate (as awful as that sounds) death as well—to see the way that death is both the epitome and the end of suffering, the way it changes everything, the way it is so final. I can't

say I'm less afraid of dying now that I've seen people I know and love face death so bravely (although they have shown me that it is at least possible to do so), but I think I can appreciate more that death is not something to shut out of your life but rather something to live with, to allow it to influence your life and not the other way around.

This is a book about allowing death to shatter the assumptions of the living, about fighting the projections that dominate us while we are alive (projections of safety, order, sovereignty, and the like) via the way the dead body reveals the failure of all of those things. Because of my own experience of the deaths of people I was very close to, I know this not just as an intellectual idea but as a personal one as well. But this is not a personal book, so I'll leave it there by saying that I dedicate this book to Nasser, Betty, and Maurice. I'll never stop wishing they hadn't died, but since they have, I want to let their deaths sit with me, and by extension, I wish for the deaths of people that you know to sit with you as well, because all of us are touched by mortality sooner or later.

Although this book is about a seemingly very morbid subject, I think it is ultimately a book not about death but about life. I ask, What is life when it is affected by death? How does death "save" life from itself? And more pointedly, and politically, how can an unburied body, a seemingly pure victim of state power and authority, serve as a font for the resistance and subversion of that very same power?

I do not pretend that losing loved ones to disease and other nonviolent matters is equivalent to the kinds of losses I am writing about here. Subjects of state and mob violence—generally, in the United States and other settler colonial nations, subjects of color—and especially bodies that have been left on display in the street, robbed of any form of dignity or privacy, experience a level of violation far, far beyond issues of personal loss and absence. Such bodies have become political objects, pawns, and a way to express the state or the racist mob's contempt for its victims. But these bodies are also something else, and it is that "something else" that I would like to focus on. I wish to recognize how, even as these bodies are made to suffer the taunts and degradations of an inherently violent and racist society, there is a way that the state—as well as other actors caught up in the web of what we have come to call (via Foucault) biopolitics—cannot

completely control and determine what their deaths mean and what their dead bodies express. It is that dimension in particular that I am trying to theorize in the pages of this book—to think about what else a dead body is beyond a pure object or a pure victim, how even a dead and unburied body can be a source of resistance, defiance, and threat to the very power that has rendered it so vulnerable and exposed. Indeed, it can be part of the unmaking of that power.

As we live in the age of Trump in the United States and many equivalent tyrants around the world, I believe this realization is more important than ever. If we think of ourselves as being only living bodies, if we think that this is all we are or have to give or hold onto, we risk a deep quiescence in the face of rising global fascism. If we hold life as so precious and irreplaceable that no risk of any kind is allowed, so that we forfeit all political power to the state and let it utterly determine its citizens (as well as define who is and is not a full citizen, who can live, and who must die), then death becomes an instrument of tyranny, a way to turn the limit on life into a mechanism of state power and authority. If, on the other hand, we learn to let the dead affect us and teach us what life is and can be when it is informed by death, then we become something more than bodies willing to do and suffer anything to preserve what we believe life has to be.

With great sorrow, I strongly believe that for all the state violence we have already seen in recent years, in the United States (and other countries as well), we are going to see an enormous piling up of the dead in the years to come: we will see countless more Michael Browns, more Trayvon Martins, more Sandra Blands, more Philando Castiles, more death on the streets, and more people of color killed behind jail cell walls. For this reason, we must not let the terror of this kind of violence silence that other, much quieter voice of the dead themselves (what I will call "the authority of the dead" in the conclusion to this book). If each murdered body simply piles up in relative anonymity, then all we get is terror. But if we let each body speak to us, we can learn something, and we can have a different political response. That is the purpose behind this book: so that we feel not despair but resolve, not just loss but a gain as well, not just terror but a sense of what life is and can be when we remember that the dead also have something to tell us. More

accurately, as I will explain further, the dead have something to *untell* us; they "speak" in an inaudible voice, but one that has tremendous force and power nonetheless. Theirs is a power that can, if we allow it to affect us, bring down even the mightiest structures of state and biopolitical oppression.

Introduction
When the State Kills, It Is (Also) Killing Itself

The long and violent history of sovereignty leaves a legacy of unburied bodies. In contemporary times, we have numerous examples of this. In the United States, Michael Brown (who was targeted for having walked in the middle of the street rather than on the sidewalk in Ferguson, Missouri) was shot to death by police officer Darren Wilson, and Brown's body was left in a pool of his own blood for four hours. In Turkey, Kevser Eltürk, also known as Ekin Wan, a PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) guerilla, was shot dead by Turkish security forces, and her naked, bloody body was left on display in the street. Another example of this phenomenon is the huge number of Native American remains that, rather than being properly buried, are often *un*buried and then held in storage or on display in museums and anthropology departments across the United States (among other places where this kind of practice occurs). These are only some of the more infamous moments in the last few years of a phenomenon that is ubiquitous to sovereign power and may even extend beyond it.[1] In classical times—albeit in the realm of theater—perhaps the best-known example of an unburied body is that of Polynices, the brother of Antigone. In the play *Antigone*, King Creon deliberately left Polynices (his nephew) unburied for having had the audacity to fight against his own city. The play revolves around Antigone's resolve to bury her brother, setting off a cascade of suicides and destruction.

1. Although contemporary forms of sovereignty may be on the wane, there is no evidence that either state murder or the various other forms of biopolitical and neoliberal violence that is inflicted on bodies—dead ones very much included—is ending. For more on waning states, see Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books, 2010).

In each of these cases, we appear to be witnessing a showing of state power, of its contempt for its victims and its display of authority. A state—or some corresponding authority system—that won't bury its victims is, it seems, an entity that is so powerful as to be able to do as it pleases. The dead bodies on display appear as warnings against others who might try to defy the state. It suggests further that the state is, in effect, above its own laws, that it can afford to flout conventions of decency and humanitarianism—if not overtly, then at least by implication. It is as if the state is saying, "We are generally law abiding, but we don't have to be. Look at what we are willing to do to show our power." What looks like a casual accident (no one got around to picking up the body yet) or a fit of sovereign pique (in *Antigone*, Creon's decision seems to have been based on whim and anger) amounts to a declaration of the true power of sovereignty, its monopoly on violence, and the exposed threat (not unlike the exposed, often naked dead bodies left on the street) that speaks to a violent discourse beneath the language of rights and lawfulness.

For all of this, there are some problems with the assumption that the state is successfully and unproblematically projecting an image of strength, that it can stand defiantly above its own laws without consequence when it displays these unburied bodies. In the contemporary stories noted above, each of these displays led to big trouble for the state in question; in modern times, social media ensures that these bodies are unburied but not forgotten. But even in earlier times, unburied bodies were remembered, marked, and—if the oppressed community in question could pull it off—honored or even avenged. The dissemination of and popular response to such imagery turns the "meaning" of these unburied bodies from a sovereign threat to a source of protest. The very same image of state power inherent in the unburied dead becomes, in the hands of protestors and resisters, a way to defy and displace that power.

Thus, to remain with the three examples I offered above, the widely disseminated images of Michael Brown's body helped fuel the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States. In Stockholm, a Kurdish woman lay naked and covered with fake blood in front of the Swedish parliament to protest the treatment of Ekin Wan, a moment that went

viral on social media. Agitation to rebury Native American remains has risen to increasing prominence as universities and museums are forced to contend with their own participation in an economy of unburial and exploitation.[2]

Antigone also suggests that the display of bodies does not always produce the results the state would desire. After all, Creon's power is ultimately unmade as first his niece Antigone, then his own son Haemon (Antigone's fiancé), and then his wife Eurydice, die in rapid succession. At the end of the play, rather than basking in sovereign authority, Creon is depicted as a ruined man, confused, broken, and weak. As the play comes to an end, his authority is perhaps the final victim in a cycle of defiance and unmaking.

How then do we reconcile the apparent display of sovereign authority inherent in unburied bodies with the radical response we see in the cases described above? What is actually being displayed when a body is left unburied? What kinds of claims are being made over the corpses of those who either deliberately or incidentally ran afoul of state authorities? In this book, I intend to look at these questions by examining some of the most basic assumptions about what these bodies signify and how people can reappropriate that significance with radical political effects. Against a liberal discourse based on personal autonomy and human rights, I will turn instead to an anarchist reading of the unburied body as itself posing a major threat to sovereign authority. I will argue that the body, far from being an object that is utterly at the disposal of the state, manifests exactly what the state cannot control; while living human beings are, generally speaking, always subject to projections of authority and power by the state (as well as other forms of authority that underwrite and surround the state), dead bodies—as I'll explain further—are not. This is not to argue that the corpse is somehow "free" of the normativity and control that the state projects onto its living subjects; rather, the corpse, being effectively beyond the reach of the state's biopolitical power, suggests a way in which that power is not totalizing.

2. Of course, there are myriad other moments when there is no backlash, when the state is not faced with its own violence; but even then, the same forms of resistance are present and legible, if not read, by those who witness this display.

It is, of course, not true that states are indifferent to dead bodies. In a recent essay, Banu Bargu, referencing Achille Mbembe's writings, speaks of "necropolitical violence," which she defines as "the violence that takes as its object the realm of the dead—the corpse, the act of burial, funerary rituals, the graves and cemeteries as sites of burial and commemoration, and forms of mourning and reverence."[3] Bargu describes how, in contemporary Turkey, this practice can be seen in acts ranging from Ekin Wan being left dead, naked, and bloody in the streets, to the booing and jeering of right-wingers over a proposed moment of silence at a soccer game for the victims of the Ankara bombings (victims who were protesting the authoritarianism of Erdoğan), to the state's refusal to let families bury the dead the state had murdered. This necropolitical violence suggests that the state cares very much about bodies of all kinds, both living and dead, and that it seeks to demonstrate its own power, as noted above, precisely through the selective violation of any sense of respect for particular dead bodies.

Bargu's description and terminology help us think further about the state's treatment of dead bodies and explain why the state often goes to such extremes to demonstrate its contempt for its enemies. This is critical to understanding why the state acts as it does from the state's own perspective. What we still need to understand, however, is how these bodies nevertheless can evade the state's grasp, how they can come to manifest—or perhaps, indeed, "embody"—something the state does not control (and perhaps no one else does either).

To think about this question further, I will consider the question of the unburied body from both a liberal perspective and a more radical one—in the latter case, principally via a reading of the body by Walter Benjamin. Benjamin helps us think about what the body is when it isn't the subject of so many projections (through a process that Althusser calls interpellation).[4] For Benjamin, rather than being something true and autonomous and self-possessing (the liberal understanding), the body is the site where the failure of projection can be read. In his view,

3. Banu Bargu, "Another Necropolitics," in "Something Is Rotten in the State," ed. Başak Ertür and James Martel, supplement, *Theory and Event* 19, no. 1 (January 2016).

4. See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" ("Ideology and the State"), in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 85–126.

this is most clearly true with corpses, insofar as their very repulsive qualities—their decay, their undeniable markers of mortality—signify that they are not sites of continuous and predetermined projections of identity and meaning. The dead body can be said to "counterproject" instead—to dispel and displace the stories and meanings the state wants to force upon each and every one of its subjects.

As such, the body, and particularly the corpse—and perhaps even more particularly, the unburied body—subverts the very narratives of state authority and power that its display is purportedly meant to demonstrate. One argument I will expand on further in this book is that as we move down through the layers of abjectness, going from least abject (the rich, the white, the male, the straight, and the cisgendered) to increasingly poor and marginal forms of status (the poor, the people of color, the female, the queer, and the transgendered) and lower still (the prisoner, the stateless refugee, the concentration camp inmate; obviously these can be overlapping categories) to the very bottom (the dead, the unburied and displayed corpse), we see a corresponding rise in the resistance to projection and normativity. To Benjamin, signs are always betraying and subverting what they are meant to represent, and the unburied body is perhaps the paradigmatic version of this tendency. Rather than being the weakest, the most vulnerable, the most victim-like site of control, the unburied body is the place where state projections of power and authority go to die themselves. Coming up against a form of materiality that is impossible to deny (given the corpse's rotting, dreadful aspect), state authority is exposed as empty and void. In other words, the nothingness of the corpse, the way it is a marker of loss and death, exposes the nothingness of the state and other forms of projected authority in a way that little else could.

This is not to celebrate the fact that states engage in such cruel practices as failing to bury their dead, whether they are deemed as enemies or peripheral subjects. I never want to discount the suffering that the families, friends, and comrades of the dead go through due to these exposures, nor do I intend to diminish the suffering of the once-living subject who is murdered and then displayed. The point is simply to say that at the moment of the state's apparent greatest strength, we see signs of its own rot and decay. By projecting that failure onto the

corpse of the victim of state violence, the state itself is exposed as a mortal, vulnerable, and all-too-human entity.

Layout of the Book

I will make my argument over the course of four chapters and a conclusion. Chapter 1 lays out my basic claims about the corpse and unburied bodies, drawing from the work of Walter Benjamin and other theorists. The chapter also engages with the liberal discourse of human rights in order to argue that the violation of the unburied body is not a matter of violating such rights. To evoke human rights in such cases is the equivalent of saying, "The state had no right to leave that body unburied; something sacred or basic about human bodies has been violated, and it is on that basis that we reject this practice." Such a position amounts to turning to some transcendent status in order to resist state violence, but in fact, state violence itself comes (as I will argue further) from that same transcendent sphere. In this way, I will argue that a discourse of human rights does not amount to a form of resistance to state violence but is in effect a perpetuation of it in a different form. Resistance to state violence must come not from within the realm of what Benjamin calls mythic violence—the projected authority that includes the doctrine of human rights as well as the general laws and policies of states—but rather from its failure, a failure that becomes particularly visible in unburied bodies as such rather than in something they symbolize or represent. Accordingly, I will argue that the value and power of the unburied dead body comes not from some higher right or natural law that gives it its due but from the way the body, and especially the dead body, disrupts and subverts the projections of political authority that it is meant to convey.

In chapter 2, I examine two key literary examples of unburied bodies from the classical period, focusing on the stories of Patroclus and Hector in the *Iliad* and then Antigone and her brother Polynices in the play *Antigone*. In these tellings, the dead body is very much caught up with the power of the state, with its symbolism and its vulnerability. I will argue that the frenzy that attaches itself to dead bodies in these stories—the lust to desecrate and the urgency to protect, retrieve, and bury these bodies, even to the point of self-sacrifice—indicates the

extent to which the dead body becomes the site where all the complexities of projected political authority come to rest, a node where state power becomes particularly and unexpectedly vulnerable and threatened.

I will contrast these two readings according to the way they treat and consider the unburied dead. Whereas in the *Iliad*, the desperate battle over corpses reveals both the hubris and vulnerability of the state, in *Antigone*, we see an example of how a ruler's attempt to use a corpse as a vehicle of state power can backfire disastrously.

In chapter 3, I treat three early modern and modern renditions of unburied dead bodies. I begin with Machiavelli's description, in *The Prince*, of the way Cesare Borgia had his own henchman, Remirro de Orco, cut in two pieces—and had his corpse, as well as the knife and cutting board used, displayed in the town square. I argue that reading Machiavelli carefully, we see that this narrative—although formally depicting Borgia's acts as a brilliant way to purge himself of the crimes that de Orco committed in his name and thus establish justice and a lasting political authority—actually or simultaneously depicts the violence and illicit authority of Borgia himself. Machiavelli's discussion of this display reveals the way that state power is always established via threats and how at the heart of a principle like "justice," one often finds a much more naked and violent form of power that is graphically depicted both through and on the dead body itself.

Following this reading of Machiavelli, I show, with a reading of a short story by Franz Kafka called "The Hunter Gracchus," how the subversive power of the dead becomes that much more visible when the competing narrative of state authority is removed. In this story, a corpse can speak for itself, and this speaking, I argue, gives voice to a subversive power that is otherwise wholly and pointedly silent. Perhaps most critically, "The Hunter Gracchus" shows how, as we move from the classical and early modern into the modern period, there is a transformation from a primary concern with the power and violence of the state to a more general—if no less political—concern with social and political violence more generally. In this parable, because the hunter represents no state or nation but is a kind of endlessly traveling—and thus stateless—figure, we see how the projections and powers of the dead

operate in a context that is relatively undistorted by sovereign phantasms of authority and control. This allows us to see not the "truth" of bodies but rather a field in which those bodies are not immediately overwritten by state interpellations (even as it is far from innocent of forms of social and political violence more generally).

Finally, I look at a description of a lynching in James Baldwin's short story "Going to Meet the Man" to focus on the particular experience of subjects of color—in particular, black subjects at the hands of a racist state and social system. In reading Baldwin's depiction of a violent episode of lynching, we see a move toward a racialized violence that suggests an ever deeper vulnerability for established political authorities even as those authorities appear ever more powerful and threatening. This story also demonstrates how state violence can morph into social violence under conditions of biopolitics (as I explain further in the following chapter) built on questions of race and violent exclusion. Here I note that Baldwin's writing provides a sense of how the violence done to black bodies becomes a way to export not just violence but death itself onto a racialized other, leaving a white community that, to cite Baldwin from another writing, "do[es] not believe in death."[5] Baldwin shows a white community that is bonded together by its belief that in killing others, it has somehow itself escaped death (the death so clearly manifested in the bodies they lynch and display), thus approaching the kind of universal—and immortal—perfect forms of subjectivity that are the ultimate promise of the liberal universal. This belief is eternally threatened by both black life and the inescapable mortality of all bodies—the white supremacists' own bodies very much included—hence exposing the vulnerability of the very community that uses the display of dead bodies of color to announce their triumph over life and death alike.

The examination of Baldwin's story transitions the book from a general consideration of unburied bodies to a focus on the racialization of these bodies—in this case, bodies of color. In chapter 4, I specifically contend with unburied bodies of color, both in literature and especially in real life, focusing at the end of the chapter on the life and death of Michael Brown. Before I get to his story, I look at

5. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 92.

the theoretical models that explain the way that race itself is a central and critical mode of transmission of authority in an era of biopolitics. Examining the work of Hortense Spillers, Achille Mbembe, and Saidiya Hartman, as well as Frank Wilderson III and Neil Roberts, I look at the various forms of violence that such racism produces as well as at ways to resist that violence, even in the context of a racist state. I turn finally to Brown himself, in part via a work by Fred Moten and Stefano Harney. I argue that in addition to the ways that Moten and Harney see resistance in Brown despite—or even because of—his death, Brown's death adds another layer of resistance, a particular exposure of the racism at the heart of the entire apparatus of the projection of power and authority in an age of biopolitics.

In the conclusion to this book, I describe the way the desire to have the dead speak can be supplemented by something else: a way to have the dead "unspeak" or "untell" us what we think they have to say, leading to Benjamin's concept of the "authority of the dead." By blocking or interfering with the mechanisms of projection (and hence "unspeaking"), the dead can in effect disrupt and undermine the kinds of voices that often appear to be legitimate protests against state violence and allow other kinds of voices (the voices that Spillers and Hartman and Moten and Harney are all listening for) to be heard more clearly and without distortion. It is these other voices, I will argue, that produce or constitute the authority of the dead and thus serve as its source.

Ultimately, I will argue that the untelling and undoing that result from the authority of the dead amount to a form of political anarchism, a politics produced in and between the breakdown of grand narratives of order and sovereign—or what I would like to call *archist*—authority. Archism is the contrary of anarchism; it is a system of rule and domination based on phantasm and projection. The term *archism* is not often used because part of the conceit of archism is that it is natural and self-evident, the only possible form of politics. For this very reason, I think it is important to give it a name and to mark it as such. Archism, as I will show, is not merely tied up with states; it can well survive the death of the state per se. What archism cannot survive is the end of hierarchy, of a sense of control

and domination, and as I will argue further, perhaps most of all, it cannot survive a loss of its own sense that it controls and holds off death (for some anyway). To the authority of archism, I would thus counterpose the authority of the dead. This is an anarchist authority, a power set against states and any other form of vertical or archist hierarchy in favor of a quieter (actually mute), subtler form of human agency and being together that the living can learn (if only by negative inference) from the dead.

Even the Dead

How much agency can we attribute to the dead? How is it possible for the dead to resist from their prone position? To think further about this question, it helps to understand the ways that human beings are never without options for resistance, even in the most dire of circumstances (with death being the most dire circumstance of them all). To stay with the example of the living for a moment, in *Freedom as Marronage*, Neil Roberts argues that even under conditions of slavery, we find degrees of freedom and agency that are generally unexpected. Marronage, he tells us, can be an internal retreat from authority, an escape to some isolated haven, or even the creation of new polities and new and creative forms of living. Roberts admonishes us not to think of freedom as an either/or phenomenon but to look for practices of resistance that move well beyond mere survival and even include what he calls "sociogenic marronage."[6] If Roberts's arguments are convincing—if, that is, we can conceive of how even under the direst situations of state and social power, even when we are dealing with slaves who are actually enchained, we can still find evidence that state power is not absolute—I would like to extend his argument to include the unburied dead. In this way, not only does the slave resist the power of the state, but (to cite Benjamin) "even the dead" show us a way to limit and undermine that false authority.[7]

If we can think of the dead as comrades in arms, as usurpers of state authority, as counterprojectors and untellers of false truths, and as

6. Neil Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 10.

7. Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, vol. 4, *1938–1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 391.

offering an authority—or perhaps a counterauthority—then we can see that there is no ultimate sign of state power and authority that is not, at the same time, a countersign. It might seem as if giving the dead their own agency (a strange kind of nonagentic agency, as I will show) is a form of buckling under and engaging in a wishful thinking so that we can feel that at least "something is being done" by the unburied dead themselves even as major forms of political and social unjustice remain ongoing and effectively unchallenged. However, I want to argue for something different. In my view, the radical potential that comes from rethinking about the unburied dead as defying state projections of power and authority is precisely possible because in this most unexpected of places, we see the most absolute form of defiance. This is important not so much for the dead themselves (I am taking no position on the afterlife or lack thereof) but for the living, the intended audience of the spectacle of the unburied dead body. When the living start to think of the state—and of archism more generally—in the way the unburied dead reveal it to be, their resistance can be more than a solace for their sense of violation and injustice. Instead, it becomes a basis for a means of revolution—and, I will argue, in particular a form of anarchist revolution—in which the dead are key agitators and the living can help them return the state to the nothingness from which it came.

One final note: I am well aware that Michel Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish*, argues that there has been a shift from medieval forms of torture and public execution to the modern prison system, where death and torture are moved out of sight, corresponding to new regimes and techniques of discipline and surveillance.[8] I do not disagree with Foucault but only note that, as he suggests, old regimes do not completely disappear, but parts of them may persist indefinitely. I think that public displays of dead victims of the state are one of those persistent practices. As I will discuss in chapter 4, Foucault himself explains that under conditions of biopolitics, the state must maintain its power to kill in order to continue to justify its ongoing existence. Thus the state periodically requires a more public display of that killing

8. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1995).

power to remind us that it continues to be both necessary and terrifying. For this reason, even if diminished in its scope, the display of the unburied bodies of those killed by the state—and other biopolitical actors—still has an outsized importance for the promotion of archist power and state authority.

Chapter One
The Disenchanted Corpse

Introduction: The Enchantments of the Corpse

For all their apparent weakness and passivity, the unburied dead are viewed as dangerous not just in Western societies but in many societies all over the world. Based on his survey of death rituals throughout the world, Arnold van Gennep observes in *Rites of Passage*,

> Like children who have not been baptized, named or initiated, persons for whom funeral rites are not performed are condemned to a pitiable existence, since they are never able to enter the world of the dead or to become incorporated into the society established there. These are the most dangerous dead. They would like to be reincorporated into the world of the living, and since they cannot be, they behave like hostile strangers toward it . . . Furthermore, these dead without hearth or home sometimes have an intense desire for vengeance [for not being properly buried]. Thus funeral rites also have a long-range utility; they help to dispose of eternal enemies of the survivors.[1]

Funeral rites (of a nearly infinite variety in van Gennep's work) transition the dead from the world of the living to the world of the dead (and transition the mourners back into the world of the living as well). To fail to perform such rites risks alienating gods, ancestors, and the dead themselves, with dire consequences for the living and the dead alike.

The horror of desecrated corpses goes deep. As Tom Laqueur tells it, Diogenes the Cynic scandalized his peers by requesting that upon his death his corpse should be flung over the city wall to be devoured by wild beasts (as we will see in the discussion of the *Iliad*, the idea of the dead being devoured by beasts was extremely fraught for the ancient Greeks).

1. Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 218. Van Gennep further states that these claims are not absolutely universal but are certainly widespread.

Diogenes asked his fellow citizens, "What harm then can the mangling of wild beasts do me if I am without consciousness?"[2] According to Laqueur, "The Cynic's argument has had a lot of admirers but has never been persuasive for very long. Just as the dead body has always been disenchanted, it has also always been enchanted: powerful, dangerous, preserved, revered, feared, an object of ritual, a thing to be reckoned with. For the living, for at least some time, it is always more than it is."[3]

In Laqueur's case, human beings cannot help but identify with the dead body; he says that "although we know that instantly or very soon after what we call biological death, it [i.e., the dead body] notices nothing, cares for nothing, feels nothing," we nonetheless feel a connection and often a great attachment to the dead body.[4] This connection stems from the fact that human beings have treated dead bodies in a mostly uncynical way for an enormous length of time. Extensive and complex rituals to bury, burn, or otherwise engage with the dead body as a way to transition it out of life are to be found in communities ranging across the planet and the reach of history. Laqueur also anchors this tendency in a kind of deep-rooted horror at the idea of leaving the dead body untreated. He suggests that the decent treatment of corpses is what marks a human being's transition from "nature to culture"; it is what distinguishes humans from animals (although it turns out that many animals also perform rituals and engage with dead bodies in "artificial" ways as well).[5] Even as the dead are rotting bodies (thus natural), they are also, Laqueur states, citing Robert Hertz, "social beings . . . creatures who need to be eased out of this world and settled safely into the next and into memory."[6] Furthermore, "death in culture takes time because it takes time for the rent in the social fabric to be rewoven and for the dead to do their work in creating, recreating, representing or disrupting the social order of which they had been a part."[7]

2. Thomas W. Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015), 3.

3. Ibid., 4.

4. Ibid., 5.

5. Ibid., 9.

6. Ibid., 10.

7. Ibid.

There is a dark corollary to Laqueur's arguments about the value of the corpse—namely, that exactly because we seem to value corpses so greatly, people (and perhaps more often states) go to great lengths to degrade and defile the corpses of perceived enemies, committing acts here again of what Banu Bargu calls "necropolitical violence." Thus in ways both positive and negative, the corpse is a great motivator of actions and reactions, a major node of organizing and explaining human life and behavior.

In his book *The Dominion of the Dead*, Robert Pogue Harrison makes his own arguments for why the dead matter to us and why rituals of transition from life to death are so critical. Harrison argues that the funeral and burial (or other modes of ritual transmittal) of dead bodies constitute a moment not of termination but rather of completion of a human life. He argues that those who are not buried are denied this form of completion and are so consigned to a kind of *"undead"* status.[8] For Harrison, there is an "almost universal association between corpse and person among human beings," what he also calls "a kind of charisma" that attaches to dead bodies (akin to the "enchantment" Laqueur discusses).[9]

Rather than seeking to reunify person and corpse through burial, Harrison suggests we do the opposite: "The obligation [to the corpse] consists in an imperative to dispose of the corpse so as to *liberate* the person from its tenacious embrace. Funeral rites serve to effect a ritual separation between the living and the dead, to be sure, yet first and foremost they serve to separate the *image* of the deceased from the corpse to which it remains bound up at the moment of demise."[10] For Harrison, the problem with the unburied body is that so long as its death remains unresolved, visible in the world as such, the corpse competes with the person connected to it; it offers an all-too-tangible material manifestation of that person and threatens to reduce him or her to a corpse, thereby pulling the individual away from life and memory (just as the dead body decomposes into unrecognizability). In this way, the unburied corpse makes it impossible to produce an image of

8. Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 144.

9. Ibid., 147.

10. Ibid.

the person that transcends death, an image that stands for the person in ways that appeal to the living. He writes, "What is a corpse if not the connatural image, or afterimage, of the person who has vanished, leaving behind a lifeless likeness of him- or herself? If the corpse embodies or holds on to the person's image at the moment of demise, funeral rites serve to disentangle that nexus and separate them into discreet entities with independent fates."[11]

In this way, burial, cremation, or other rituals allow the living to reconcile themselves to death in a way that does not overpower them. Harrison and Laqueur agree on one point: to continually live in the active face of death is too much for human beings. The corpse in particular makes it impossible for us to forget our own mortality, so we seek to contain that reminder in rituals that allow us to feel some degree of control or agency over that which threatens us the most (i.e., death).

The Disenchanted Corpse

What is a problem for Harrison, the way the corpse threatens the holistic image of the person, is a great benefit for Walter Benjamin. For Benjamin, the notion that the corpse as such threatens the human tendency to project various identities and meanings onto the living and the dead alike is one of our few reliable fonts of resistance to phantasm. Whereas Harrison openly seeks enchantment and Laqueur seeks to argue with Diogenes, for Benjamin the corpse's power lies not in the way it is merely a passive site for projection (for enchantment or charisma) but rather in the way it itself can "disenchant" the living human beings who come into contact with it. In this way, and only in this way, the corpse can be said to have an "agency" of its own (albeit an agency whose only power is to unmake and subvert the power normally projected onto bodies).

Theodor Adorno said of Benjamin that he "viewed the world from the perspective of the dead."[12] It is certainly true that Benjamin thinks about the dead in unique ways. For one thing, they don't seem quite *as dead* to him as they are to many other thinkers and writers. For

11. Ibid., 148.

12. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 688n43. This is quoted from Adorno's "Zu Benjamins Gedächtnis" (1940), in *Über Walter Benjamin.*

Benjamin, the dead are not safely ensconced in the past. As previously noted, he tells us in his "On the Concept of History" that "*even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he is victorious. And this enemy has never ceased to be victorious."[13] For Benjamin, the dead are not shut off from the contingencies and risks that affect the living. Benjamin rejects ordinary understandings of time as being redolent of the teleological biases of Western thought; for him, change can go backward, forward, and sideways through time, so even as the dead can affect us, we can, in turn, affect the dead (including the long-ago dead).

Given this two-way discourse between the living and the dead, it becomes clear that for Benjamin the dead body lies at the nexus of a very complicated relationship. In his *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, he writes,

> And if it is in death that the spirit becomes free, in the manner of spirits, it is not until then that the body too comes properly into its own. For this much is self-evident: the allegorization of the physis can only be carried through in all its vigour in respect of the corpse. And the characters of the *Trauerspiel* [the German baroque plays that are the study of Benjamin's book] die, because it is only thus, as corpses, that they can enter into the homeland of allegory. It is not for the sake of immortality that they meet their end, but for the sake of the corpse.[14]

For Benjamin, the kinds of projections we make onto the body are indicative of a larger set of projections that constitute part of what he calls "mythic violence"—that is, the projections of authority, identity, and nature that determine and control our lives both collectively and individually.[15] This violence is "mythic" because it has no basis in reality or ontology. Benjamin contrasts mythic violence with divine violence—that which is undertaken by God and, in a sense, is "realer" than anything human beings say or do, though it is entirely obscure to us and has no effective presence except for the way that it interferes

13. Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, vol. 4, *1938–1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 391 (my emphasis). I will return to this passage later in this book when Saidiya Hartman cites it in her own discussion of racial politics.

14. Walter Benjamin, *Origin of German Tragic Drama* (New York: Verso, 1998), 217–18.

15. Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, vol. 1, *1913–1926* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 248.

with mythic violence (which, paradoxically, forms what passes for "reality" on earth).

In Benjamin's view, the state in particular is a promulgator of mythic violence. In its anxiety to promote an image of power and authority that has no actual ontological basis, the state engages in various forms of violence, both literal and metaphorical, to assert the fact of and its right to its existence. It engages in violence on the living and the dead in order to establish its jurisdiction and its power, in particular in terms of its power to kill its subjects (as well as "enemies of the state," however they are defined). Thus, Benjamin writes in his "Critique of Violence," "if violence, violence crowned by fate, is the origin of law, then it may be readily supposed that where the highest violence, that over life and death, occurs in the legal system, the origins of law jut manifestly and fearsomely into existence. [The purpose of capital punishment] is not to punish the infringement of law but to establish new law."[16]

While we are alive, it seems that we have little recourse (except for the openings produced by divine violence) to resist the mythic projections of the state. Our very personhood seems to be both defined and produced by acts that correspond to what Louis Althusser calls interpellation, a kind of colonization of our subjectivity by external and material processes.

Yet, as Benjamin indicates above, the corpse more effectively resists these projections and hence exposes what is true for the living body as well: the body's failure to be that which the state and other social forces insist it is. When Benjamin states in the *Origin* that "it is only thus, as corpses, that they can enter into the homeland of allegory," he is referring to the way that corpses, in their very rotting materiality, interfere with the exalted projections that generally form the images that are intended to epitomize (and totalize) the dead person.

A bit earlier in the *Origin*, Benjamin writes, "The human body could be no exception to the commandment which ordered the destruction of the organic so that the true meaning, as it is written and ordained, might be picked up from its fragments."[17] In the hands of a more

16. Ibid., 242.

17. Benjamin, *Origin*, 216–17.

orthodox writer, this statement could be read as meaning that it is only in the destruction of the body, its death or dismemberment, that we see the true person emerging (he is specifically speaking in this passage about using parts of bodies as emblems or icons to represent that person as a saint or martyr). But for Benjamin, what is "true" about the body is not its ultimate and perfect expression but rather the decidedly imperfect corpse it leaves behind. Benjamin goes on to explain that it is the corpse, and not the living body, that truly encapsulates what life is: "Seen from the point of view of death, the product of the corpse is life. It is not only in the loss of limbs, not only in the changes of the aging body, but in all the processes of elimination and purification that everything corpse-like falls away from the body piece by piece. It is no accident that precisely nails and hair, which are cut away as dead matter from the living body, continue to grow on the corpse. There is in the physis, in the memory itself, a *memento mori*."[18] Despite our best efforts to deny what the body is, the body continues to be itself; even in death it continues to have a form of life (although not one that any of us might want to claim). In the end it is not the living subject but the corpse as body that remains, defying and interfering with our projections, our denial, our surgeries and Botoxes, our frantic dance to avoid recognizing that we are and have always been mortal and fleshy beings.

This is how the corpse is connected to allegory. Allegory represents for Benjamin a subversive trope that unmakes and ruins our attempts to project truth and ontology into the universe. It is, simply put, the site where the failure and breakdown of those projections becomes most visible; the corpse is the human being's most fundamental font of that resistance.

Although it is true that our bodies resist and defy projection equally when we are alive, the presence of such resistance is not as visible upon the living body as it is upon the corpse. Again it is the corpses' repulsive and all-too-mortal qualities (literally written into the dead body) that render it relatively immune to the projections that otherwise determine who we are. For Benjamin, objects in general subvert and defy human projection, but the dead body is perhaps a uniquely well-suited

18. Ibid., 218.

object to promote that defiance.[19] The tables, lamps, and chairs with which we surround ourselves are in a sense in a continual state of revolt against our attempts to fetishize them (and, in particular, to treat them as commodities), but the dead body is something that was once "one of us"—that is, it is the object we living beings are embodied by but that we try to either deny or master. The dead body is an object intimately related to the living beings who respond to it. It refuses the division between (human) subject and object and indicates that the living are also material objects and that they too—despite their denial—are effectively the same as the rotting corpse (thus they are not all those other, better things that they are always promised they are or could be, perhaps especially under conditions of liberal—and also illiberal—capitalism).

If corpses reveal something about all bodies living or dead, this is perhaps even clearer in terms of corpses that have been subjects of state violence—that is, when bodies are left unburied, naked, and bloody in full public view. Benjamin argues that blood is the sign the state requires to prove its right to exist; thus a bloody dead body appears to be the ultimate sign of state power. But even as it represents that assertion of authority and power, the unburied body is simultaneously (and this is where we can see Benjamin at his most subversive) a marker of the absence of state power, of its reliance on such signs to exist at all. When the sign of state power also becomes the sign of its nonexistence, we have entered into "the homeland of allegory," the place where signs—even signs or objects that are also human bodies—revolt against their representational function and disrupt the projections that accompany such representations.

Benjamin's interest in the German baroque playwrights that were the subject of the *Origin of German Tragic Drama* reflects the way that bodies—often staged as being dead—figure prominently in these plays. He tells us that "in the *Trauerspiel* of the seventeenth century the corpse becomes quite simply the pre-eminent emblematic property. The apotheoses [of the plays] are barely conceivable without it."[20]

19. I discuss this revolution of objects at greater length in James Martel, *Textual Conspiracies: Walter Benjamin, Idolatry and Political Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011).

20. Benjamin, *Origin*, 218.

Benjamin cites, for example, the stage direction for one play, which starts by showing "a large field, filled with many bodies, soldiers in the defeated army of the Emperor Mauritius, as well as several rivulets flowing from the nearby mountains."[21] Another play concludes with "two bodies [being] bourne onto the stage on biers by servants . . . and placed on opposite sides. Plantia [the heroine of the play] speaks no more but goes most mournfully from one corpse to the other, kisses the heads and hands, until she finally sinks down unconscious over the body of Papinian [her lover] and is carried off after the body by her ladies-in-waiting."[22] For Benjamin, such depictions do not (only) point to a morbid or gruesome temperament on the part of the playwrights. Rather, they attest to a radically subversive cast to these plays, wherein their material practices belie the overt (and presumably intended) message of the plays, which is to affirm and worship sovereign authority. Instead of shoring up such authority, the bodies scattered throughout these plays (not actually dead, in this case, but certainly meant to be read as such) undermine such assertions. For Benjamin, the presence of these corpses tends to overwhelm the sovereigns both physically (in terms of being upstaged by them) and emotionally (in terms of being soundly defeated by their insistent and undeniable presence, just as the pileup of dead bodies overwhelms Creon in *Antigone*). In this case, the very symbol of bloody power becomes a sign that eviscerates rather than promotes state power and authority; the beliefs that such a power rests upon are shattered by the sight of a corpse. The fact that a power so absolute can also be so ephemeral is perhaps only made legible by recourse to the complex play of semiotics on the field of the unburied dead body.

By linking up the image and treatment of the corpse with the narratives of sovereignty, Benjamin shows the inner workings of archism, that modality of power that most closely conforms to the workings of mythic violence. Insofar as the power of states and other archist entities are caught up, above all, with both giving and avoiding death—with killing their perceived enemies and promising their (favored) citizens a life without fear of death (really a life based on

21. Ibid., 220.

22. Ibid., 219.

the fear of death)—the corpse poses the most direct challenge to this inner architecture. Funerals and other rituals of completion serve the purposes of states and other archist powers because they keep the dead within the narrative of nonthreatening subjection to those authorities. Benjamin's focus on the corpse and its rotting allegorical character is a direct and dire challenge to archism because it gives the lie to the most basic premise upon which archist authority is based.

In thinking in this way, Benjamin is therefore engaging, in my view, in a deeply anarchist form of thinking and responding to dead bodies (more on that in the conclusion). If indeed Benjamin operates, as Adorno claims, from the "perspective of the dead," we might broaden this concept (or at least adopt it from Adorno) to refer to the ways that Benjamin allows the dead to affect him even as he believes that we can affect the dead. If, in fact, the corpse interferes with the projections of mythic violence and archist thinking that dominate and control our lives, to allow ourselves to be affected by that interference (to be "interrupted," as Bonnie Honig suggests) sustains our resistance and helps us subvert and ruin some of the phantasms to which we subscribe.[23]

Recall that Laqueur posits that the "dead [do] their work in creating, recreating, representing or disrupting the social order of which they had been part." Although, as noted, the lamentation and burial of the dead generally support rather than undermine the archist forms that orchestrate such rituals, if we focus for a moment on the possibility of "disrupting the social order," we see that it doesn't have to be this way. If we think about the dead "doing work" in terms of producing and disrupting the social order, we can see that they do indeed transmit a great and subversive power in the world.

Whereas the state ceaselessly seeks to employ the corpse as an agent of its own power and authority, Benjamin proposes something different; he asks us not to control the corpse but to let the corpse control or at least influence us. Allowing the corpse to tell us what it knows not just about death but also about life transforms us, and in this way, the corpse goes from being a peripheral matter of human life to being at its very center. More precisely, as I will argue in the conclusion, the corpse doesn't so much tell as *untell* us something, challenging our most

23. See Bonnie Honig, *Antigone, Interrupted* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

profound beliefs via its own interruption of life (and business) as usual and potentially leading to anarchist outcomes. Rather than bundling the corpse away or desecrating it to show our "power" over it, Benjamin implicitly asks that we cease to fear the corpse and instead welcome the relief it brings from phantasmagoric delusions. To put it in James Baldwin's terms, once again, Benjamin asks us to believe in death—in its reality and in the way it inflects and shapes the living—even as we endlessly project (with a much louder voice) a world in which death is absent (at least for the privileged subject; for the subject of color, as I'll argue at the end of chapter 3, it is an entirely different story). In a world where reality itself is produced by phantasm, the corpse is, if not *really* real, as real as it gets from the perspective of the living. For this reason, even the most extreme display of state contempt for the unburied dead cannot erase this power or this interference. We can certainly choose not to see that power (and generally speaking, we don't, because it is so eclipsed by the awesome display of sovereign violence), but it can never be eliminated or even forgotten. It remains whenever and wherever the dead are present, and the dead are always and everywhere.

Does a Corpse Have Human Rights?

There are other responses besides Benjamin's that, even as they appear to give the corpse its due, do not draw upon the corpse's subversive power in the way that Benjamin's approach does; rather, they reinforce archist discourses even in the guise of sometimes defying state power (here it is helpful to remember that archism is always a bigger phenomenon than state sovereignty alone). For instance, people often turn to the discourse of human rights in opposing the desecration of the dead. The idea is that inalienable and universal rights are imbued on each body, alive or dead, by dint of the body's very existence (or former existence). Accordingly, the body can be said to possess and display its own intervention against state power and violence, its own sanction for what the state chooses to do with the bodies (both living and dead) within and under its power. Clearly this only goes so far; paradoxically, leaders such as George Bush, Donald Trump, and Barack Obama, along with Tayip Recep Erdoğan, Vladimir Putin, and countless other state leaders, are all well versed in employing the language of human

rights to justify and promote an inordinate amount of state-sponsored violence. But even in less egregious cases, a turn to human rights is a turn not toward but away from death and its lessons and thus a turn toward archism and its denial of death at all costs.

A rhetoric of human rights clearly does not prevent state-sponsored killing, but does it perhaps provide a vocabulary by which to condemn it as well as a means by which to seek remedies and even justice? In my view, the answer is no. On the contrary, as I see it—and I'm far from being alone in this insight—the ability of nominally democratic and tolerant states to employ a language of human rights to justify their own violence is no accident but is indicative of a deeper connection between the workings of contemporary state power and violence and the doctrine of human rights itself.

To understand this doctrine a bit better, I must temporarily abandon an exclusive focus on the bodies of the dead and also look at the treatment of living bodies and, in particular, the treatment of refugees and other stateless persons. There is an enormous and excellent literature that criticizes human rights discourse from a number of positions. As Samuel Moyn points out, the discourse of human rights is not a timeless and eternal notion but rather a product of the twentieth century and, more specifically, the post–World War II period.[24] Even as this doctrine was being born (only to wrap itself in a kind of immemorialization that Moyn, among others, has helped dispel), it came under attack by one of the greatest thinkers of that period, Hannah Arendt.

According to Arendt, the twentieth century, far from extending the bases of rights to displaced and otherwise oppressed citizens, radically restricted them. She writes, for example, that the ancient right of asylum, long held as a practice in the West, was effectively withdrawn during the time of the two world wars. She tells us that this right "shares, in this respect, the fate of the Rights of Man, which also never became law but led a somewhat shadowy existence as an appeal in individual exceptional cases for which normal legal institutions did not suffice."[25]

---

24. See Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012).

25. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 280–81.

This is the crux of the problem for Arendt. The idea of "human rights" as coming from human beings independently from any notion of God or transcendent justice effectively means that whenever such rights are actually put to the test—in her case, this is particularly clear when people become stateless, as they did before, during, and after World War II in massive numbers (and is the case today as well)—there is no mechanism by which to implement them. "Human" rights, when detached from national rights, become purely abstract; when actual nation-states deal with displaced human beings, these rights are shown to be quite empty and without any practical meaning. Its support for human rights notwithstanding, the general approach of the international community—including the current crisis of migration in Europe (from the Middle East), in the United States (from Mexico and Central America), and Australia (from Southeast Asia and elsewhere)—has been to deplore the conditions of the stateless but to do next to nothing or nothing at all to help or protect them. Even worse, sometimes the way these states treat their refugees exposes them to new horrors of death, violence, rape, disease, and other forms of abjectness. According to Arendt,

> If a human being loses his political status, he should, according to the implications of the inborn and inalienable rights of man, come under exactly the situation for which the declarations of such general rights provided. Actually the opposite is the case. It seems that a man who is nothing but a man has lost the very qualities that make it possible for other people to treat him as a fellow-man. This is one of the reasons why it is far more difficult to destroy the legal personality of a criminal, that is of a man who has taken upon himself the responsibility for an act whose consequences now determine his fate, than of a man who has been disallowed all common human responsibilities.[26]

Herein lies the great paradox of "human rights": when a human being has been reduced to just that, to being *only* a human being and nothing more (i.e., not a member of a state that offers its own particular protections and rights), he or she has no effective rights at all. The idea that being human is itself the source of rights fails to produce any corresponding political body or organization that enforces or oversees the promulgation of those rights.[27]

---

26. Ibid., 300.

27. Relatedly, in chapter 3, I argue, via a reading of a short story by James Baldwin, that the purpose of white supremacy is not to reduce black people to the level of subhumans

Indeed, Arendt goes on to argue that the publics connected to the various sovereign actors in the world are not only not supporters of an effective doctrine of human rights; they are actually deeply opposed to them:

> Since the Greeks, we have known that highly developed political life breeds a deep-rooted suspicion of this private sphere, a deep resentment against the disturbing miracle contained in the fact that each of us is made as he is—single, unique, unchangeable. This whole sphere of the merely given, relegated to private life in civilized society, is a permanent threat to the public sphere, because the public sphere is as consistently based on the law of equality as the private sphere is based on the law of universal difference and differentiation.[28]

The "law of equality" in the public sphere is an assertion of equality that has no basis in nature (much like the assertion of a doctrine of human rights, for Arendt, has no basis in nature but actually represents the opposite, the overcoming or conquest of nature, which is manifestly unequal). Against this assertion of equality, we have the innumerable forms of inequality that persist and are even presupposed by this formal political equality. In the same way that the spectacle of the unburied dead body threatens the projections of interpellated personhood and state authority projected over it by its undeniable material status, the spectacle of the stateless person, in his or her abjectly and deeply human condition, is too stark to paper over with talk of "natural" rights. His or her very presence deeply threatens the belief in universal human equality by means of a very legible and undeniable de facto inequality. For that reason, stateless people are often made to suffer an ever-deeper form of inequality. Arendt writes,

> The reason why highly developed political communities, such as the ancient city-state or modern nation-states, so often insist on ethnic homogeneity is that they hope to eliminate as far as possible those natural and always present differences and differentiations which by themselves arouse dumb hatred, mistrust, and discrimination because they indicate all too clearly those spheres where men cannot act and change at will, *i.e.* the limitations

---

but rather to demonstrate that they are *only* human and thus fleshy, mortal beings. By emphasizing the mere humanity of black people, whites are thus elevated (according to this phantasmic logic) to the level of superhuman, where death itself has been exported and projected onto black bodies in order to "save" and elevate white bodies.

28. Arendt, *Origins*, 301.

> of the human artifice. The "alien" is a frightening symbol of the fact of difference as such, of individuality as such, and indicates those realms in which man cannot change and cannot act and in which, therefore, he has a distinct tendency to destroy.[29]

In this way, the public societies of the world are in constant tension with and even hostile to the fact of human diversity. This diversity cannot be willed away, cannot be handled politically, except in extreme forms, such as the Nazis' "final solution" to a problem—the "Jewish problem," in their case—that stubbornly resisted attempts to deny, ignore, or will it away. This is the case precisely because such situations are not "problems" at all; they are just reflections of the variety of human attributes and identities.

As I will explain further in chapter 4 (by a turn to Michel Foucault), this reliance on homogeneity in defiance of human diversity means that racism is built into the apparatus of contemporary states. Racism is both a response to diversity and a way to contend with (and even benefit from) the forms of human difference (something maintained not despite of but because of the formal equality many nation-states ascribe to their members).

For this reason, the assertion of "human rights" immediately comes up against a question: Who is to be considered human? Given that individual actors in their naked humanity represent highly reduced and circumscribed subjects (or perhaps nonsubjects) in the absence of state identities, it seems that humanness itself becomes an attribute available only to those who are members of a state regardless of formal declarations of universal membership in the human race. As Arendt puts it, however, it's not so much that displaced and stateless people stop being considered human entirely but rather that they become human in a much smaller and more limited way:

> The great danger arising from the existence of people forced to live outside the common world is that they are thrown back, in the midst of civilization, on their natural givenness, on their mere differentiation. They lack that tremendous equalizing of differences which comes from being citizens of some commonwealth and yet, since they are no longer allowed to partake in the human artifice, they begin to belong to the human race in much the same way as animals belong to specific animal species. The paradox involved

29. Ibid.

> in the loss of human rights is that such loss coincides with the instant when a person becomes a human being in general—without a profession, without a citizenship, without an opinion, without a deed by which to identify and specify himself—*and* different in general, representing nothing but his own absolutely unique individuality which, deprived of expression within and action upon a common world, loses all significance.[30]

Here we come back to questions of the body and the way it produces interruptions in the narratives of purity, security, and order we project onto it. The stateless person, while technically being considered as "human," is so only in a purely biological (or natural) sense and thus not in a political sense.

Accordingly, stateless persons are not the beneficiaries of the projections of identity bestowed upon citizens of a state. The actual meaning of humanness in the modern context—that is, the very concept of being human in a way that transcends divine or natural origins and sets itself as its own standard of value—falls away in such cases, leaving the individual in question bereft and without protection. (Later, in chapter 3, I will argue that in fact humanness per se is not always necessarily a privileged category; just as Arendt shows that it can be manifestly reduced to being "only human," I will argue, via Baldwin, that antiblack racism represents an attempt to reduce black people to this state of being "only human" while whites take on a superhuman, and thus more than mortal, identity by comparison and extension.)

Arendt is not necessarily a critic of rights per se (she famously speaks of the "right to have rights," for example); rather, she sees them as a purely political matter, an artifact of human decision making and action. Her discourse about the limitations of human rights points to the weakness of human rights as an alternative explanation for the power and "charisma" of bodies both dead and alive. But it also points to something perhaps more profound: the way the body and the protections it enjoys (or the depravations it suffers from) under conditions of state control are never ontologically given. The "enchantments" of sovereignty are merely projections, hopes, fears, and decisions that come out of political processes and are not tied to the body itself. For this reason, living or dead, the body serves as a site, again, where such

30. Ibid., 302.

projections can be shown to fail. The body as such—living or dead, but especially dead, as I have already argued—is an agent of disenchantment. We see this most clearly with the corpse, but we also see it with the stateless person (and sometimes, very sadly, in the stateless corpse, as the body of Alan Kurdi, a young boy found on the beach of a Greek island after trying to escape from Syria with his family, signifies).

Statelessness renders legible what bodies are when they are not the subject of rights and protections—that is, when they are not a screen on which the state projects its phantasms of control and order (of course, other projections are made onto such bodies, as I will discuss momentarily when considering Agamben's work on this subject). The idea of "human rights" may be a screen to extend the enchantment of living, stated bodies to "everyone"—that is, a way to act as if the state's enchantments are universal and not particular, not dependent on the whims and power (and vulnerability) of particular states. But the very bodies meant to display this universality also demonstrate its clear and abject failure and absence. Arendt's analysis in the *Origins of Totalitarianism* shows the weakness and frailty of such a projection and reinforces what Benjamin has to say about the corpse—and, more particularly, the unburied body.

Finally, to return to a question I raise at the beginning of this section, although the language of rights seems to be directed *against* states—at least those that violate rights (which, by the way, is all of them)—thinking in terms of archism rather than merely in terms of states allows us to see a kind of collusion in what is generally portrayed as an antagonism. To speak of universal and natural rights is to appeal to the language of archism, to the urge to control life and stave off death, to the phantasmic promises that states make to their citizens and archism in general (a phenomenon, as I will argue in chapter 4, that extends to biopolitics as well as to sovereignty, among other phenomena). To employ such language reinscribes us in a system that perpetuates sovereignty, state power, and archism even when it looks as if we are doing an end-run around state authority by appealing to some "higher" authority. We must dispel this false dichotomy in order to avoid falling into one of the many traps archism sets for the living in its urge to utterly control and dominate them.

For his own part, Giorgio Agamben is less a critic of human rights doctrine per se and more a critic of the entire panoply of rights and enchantments that come with states more generally. Agamben's description of the *homo sacer*, the one who is banned and "may be killed and yet not sacrificed," roughly correlates to Arendt's notion of the stateless person, who is "only" human.[31] This figure too is cast beyond the boundaries of society. For Agamben, though, although formally outside the borders of the state (indeed, banned by the state and sent into political limbo), the *homo sacer* is not unconnected with the laws of society. In fact, he or she is quite intensely the subject of those laws, perhaps more so than when part of society itself. In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben writes, "He who has been banned is not, in fact, simply set outside the law and made indifferent to it but rather *abandoned* by it, that is, exposed and threatened on the threshold in which life and law, outside and inside, become indistinguishable. It is literally not possible to say whether the one who has been banned is outside or inside the juridical order."[32] Whereas in Arendt's description of the stateless person, the problem is that he or she is truly outside the reach and protection of law, for Agamben, the problem is precisely the opposite: the (now) stateless subject remains very much within the orbit of law and state power (albeit in an entirely negative way).

Indeed, for Agamben, in a sense, the subject of the ban is the subject of law par excellence. He tells us, "The originary relation of law to life is not application but Abandonment."[33] He also states that "the ban is a form of relation."[34] For Agamben, law, when stripped of its formal content—when, like the life that has been abandoned (or "disenchanted," in Laqueur's parlance), it is reduced to its merest form of existence—takes on the quality of being "in force without significance."[35] Such a state of law converges with the "bare life" (a term

31. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), 8.

32. Ibid., 28–29.

33. Ibid., 29.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid., 54.

he takes from Benjamin) that the ban has produced, what remains when we strip away the enchantments of sovereignty and its seeming protections:[36]

> We have seen the sense in which law begins to coincide with life once it has become the pure force of law, law's mere being in force without significance. But insofar as law is maintained as pure form in a state of virtual exception, it lets bare life . . . subsist before it. Law that becomes indistinguishable from life in a real state of exception is confronted by life that, in a symmetrical but inverse gesture, is entirely transformed into law . . . Only at this point do the two terms distinguished and kept united by the relation of the ban (bare life and form of law) abolish each other and enter into a new dimension.[37]

Yet what for Arendt is a catastrophe—the reduction to bare life and being "merely human"—is something different for Agamben. Or rather, this reduction *is* the catastrophe, but one that contains or even constitutes its own resolution.[38] The subject, so reduced, becomes, as Agamben puts it, "inoperable," defeating and subverting the way subjects are normally determined. Inoperability is, for Agamben, the realization of the potential "not to" that lies in every existing thing. *Not* operating, *not* obeying and projecting laws, the subject of bare life is like the corpse that Benjamin attends to, only it is still alive.

Or at least it is mainly alive: several of the examples Agamben offers in *Homo Sacer* are of nearly dead or catatonic figures. One figure is Karen Ann Quinlan, whose comatose body was the subject of a great deal of legal struggle in the United States in the 1970s.[39] Another key example is Agemben's explication of *der Muselmann* ("the Muslim"), a figure he takes from Primo Levi's description of certain concentration camp prisoners who were reduced to a state of near death by their mistreatment (but were not actually dead). Of this figure, Agamben asks, "What is the life of the *Muselmann*? Can one say that it is pure *zoē* [i.e., a purely biological body, 'only human' in a way similar to Arendt's point about those outside the scope of the nation state]? Nothing 'natural'

36. Ibid., 55.

37. Ibid.

38. For an excellent explication of this, see Jessica Whyte, *Catastrophe and Redemption* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2013).

39. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 186.

or 'common,' however, is left in him. . . . All his instincts are canceled along with his reason."[40]

Indeed, Agamben goes on to say that insofar as the *Muselmann* is impervious to further brutality, he or she could be considered "a silent form of resistance."[41] He writes, "Here a law that seeks to transform itself entirely into life finds itself confronted with a life that is absolutely indistinguishable from law, and it is precisely this indiscernibility that threatens the *lex animata* of the camp."[42] This is critical for Agamben: it suggests the collapse of the dominant regime into that which it dominates. This parallels his interest in "a *bios* that is only its own *zoē*" —that is, a political and artificial body merging with a "natural" body (one that isn't quite natural either because of the artifice of its separation from *zoē* in the first place).[43] This is not unlike Arendt's distinction between being "merely" human (the subject of an empty human rights) and being human in the sense of belonging to a political community (or what she calls a "world").[44]

For Agamben, this separation (specifically between *bios* and *zoē*) is the catastrophe that has set off two millennia of abusive Western power and sovereignty, his own explanation for the sources of archism (although that is not a word he uses). Yet when the structures of power are reduced to the minimum—paradoxically by their seeming absolute "success" in reducing their victims to near nothingness (as in the case of the *Muselmann*)—that nothingness itself comes back to haunt and overwhelm the power that set it into motion. This reduction of the body to bare life and the potential to "not be" that it unleashes is, for Agamben, a counterpower that can overcome what otherwise seems like an inevitable and fatal sovereign power.

In some ways, Agamben's reading of the body, and what happens to it when the state excludes it, may seem to track close to Benjamin's points about the dead body as a site of resistance. The resistance of the *Muselmann* seems to shade into the resistance of the corpse (and

40. Ibid., 185.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid., 188.

44. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 22.

indeed they are nearly the same). Read in this way, it might also seem as if Arendt, in her own concern with the subject of human rights, is privileging the realm of projection and phantasm ("the political") at the expense of the bodies in question. To some extent, I think there is something in both of these claims, yet I would nonetheless argue that Agamben isn't aligned with Benjamin on this point, and Arendt is not the inadvertent spokesperson for phantasm that she might seem to be at first glance.

While it's certainly true that the *Muselmann*'s broken body represents the failure of projections of political authority, Agamben tends to see this figure not so much as a failure but as a success, as someone who has successfully broken the bonds of *potestas* that are the heritage of Western civilization and reconnected with its own potentiality to not be (*potentia*). As Jessica Whyte describes in her book on Agamben entitled *Catastrophe and Redemption*, there is an unexpectedly teleological side to this extremely antiteleological thinker, insofar as the move toward catastrophe and then through catastrophe toward redemption seems somehow built in.[45] In this reading, the move from the original ancient Greek attempt to abandon *zoē* and the potentiality to *not be* leads inexorably to the holocaust, which culminates this logic only to return us to what we have been trying to escape from for some 2,500 years: our bodies, our mortality, and the ultimate manifestation of our potential for not being (namely, death).

Yet rather than say with Agamben that this is the process working itself out (by not working out, ironically), I'd say that the kind of breakdowns inherent in the body that I've been describing (whether alive, dead, or almost dead, whether a citizen or stateless) are not the product of some transhistorical forces—like one unfurling great disaster—but rather reflect the way that these truth narratives have always failed and will continue to fail. It's thus not the body itself that is rendered inoperable but rather the false narrative of autonomy, power, and sovereignty that is mapped onto that body in the form of interpellation, and other colonizations of self via external and generally capitalist and archist forms of authority and rule.

45. See again Whyte, *Catastrophe*.

In this way, *inoperative* is not the word I would choose to describe the selves that emerge from this process. Even when that self is actually dead and hence completely immobile, I think the body as such still (or maybe especially) *operates*—that is, it works to defuse and subvert the projections that are continually set upon it, rendering *those* projections inoperable in the process. It is precisely this operation that I am most interested in exploring.

In a sense, to call those bodies "inoperable" is to cede to sovereign phantasm its power to control and dominate. Yes, these bodies become inoperable as far as the state is concerned, but one of the great benefits of Benjamin's analysis is that he manages to see things *not* from the state's perspective, to render *it* and not *us* the problem. In this way, calling the *Muselmann* inoperable perpetuates, perhaps inadvertently, the focus on the state as *the* privileged actor, the *ur*-agent that determines what agency is and does and who operates and who does not.

Similarly, by thinking of inoperability as being at the long end of a transhistorical process risks, as previously noted, the very teleology that Agamben is otherwise so adamantly opposed to. In my view, there is nothing Hegelian (at least in the way Hegel is usually read) about the narrative I am interested in pursuing via Benjamin. There is no "before" or "after," no grand return or return in a new and unprecedented form; there is indeed nothing to return to, just projections and resistances to be subverted and undermined. The resistant powers I am discussing are not timeless and eternal; they do not take part in an enormous, collective shift in response to the various ways bodies and subjects are conceptualized and operationalized. Instead, they are contingent on and of the moment, resisting, in turn, any grand narrative that organizes them into some great cosmic trajectory (just as much, or as little, as during the time of the Greeks as today).

To be fair, I think many strands in Agamben argue for exactly these kinds of nonsequential, antiteleological forms of resistance and struggle. This is the part of his work that is most open to Benjamin, among others (I think, for example, that his notion of "form of life" works very well with a Benjaminian model). Even if his notion of inoperability partakes in his more stealthy teleological (and hence non-Benjaminian)

side, Agamben has a lot to contribute to our idea of what the dead (or the near dead) do to and for the living.

As for the Arendtian side of the equation, while it's no doubt true that Arendt's preference for the political could accommodate the kinds of phantasms I've been describing, she is highly suspicious of ideas of representation and party and state power (being combined, once again, in what I call archism). Arendt's own version of politics is far more rooted in local and mutual communities than in the actions and identities of large states (especially in the modern age; when it comes to the classical era, she tends to be more forgiving of the foibles of states of that period, especially in terms of the Roman republic). The exclusion of stateless populations she describes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* does not therefore mean that Arendt wishes for or approves of state identity above all. All she is saying is that without some kind of organized political model, a subject effectively has no rights at all (i.e., is not even a subject).[46]

By looking at the work of Arendt and Agamben in tandem, we see more clearly how the body is not so much imbued with inherent rights (as liberal doctrine in general and human rights doctrine specifically assert) as it is a counterforce that defies what states and other biopolitical forces tell it that it is. As previously noted, to assert that the source of the body's resistance to projection is "natural law," "human rights," or some other transcendent form of validity is only to resort to what Arendt otherwise calls "the absolute," a way of conceptualizing that trumps human politics. Because these discourses of transcendent rights partake in the same universal and the same sense of authority and justice as sovereign forms of power, I'd say that to resort to a language of human rights is equivalent to having the fox (even a sometimes very benevolent fox) guard the henhouse.

In my view, the belief in transcendent authorities is itself indicative of a sovereign, archist mind-set. The state draws its own claims of authority from similar sources, and in each case, as Arendt and

46. This question, however, begs a prior question about the actual proper form of the political. In her own way, Arendt can be as opposed to projection as is Benjamin (although she is a bit more complicated in her approach than he is). She sees the immersion of the subject in a plurality with other persons as the way to check our tendency to project (to represent).

Agamben both note, these seemingly celestial powers and rights are built on a great field of violence, pain, and death (to loosely cite Robert Cover).[47] The question, then, is how to take that violence and death and turn it around, not by recourse to more of the same (i.e., more projection and hence more violence), but by taking the power of death away from the state and returning it to the living, who are nominally under the state's control.

Necroresistance

If I have been convincing that the body, even the dead body, *operates*, it remains to be understood how such an operation occurs and furthermore how it can be translated into a clear political agenda. What kinds of powers do our bodies *as such* give us over and above the usual notions of agency and interpellation that tend to monopolize our sense of what we can and cannot be and do? How can we harness and utilize the power of the corpse—if that is, in fact, a power—while still alive? What, in other words, can the body (and particularly the dead body) do for and to the living, and how can the living act so as to reflect and enhance this power in politically meaningful ways?

One contemporary thinker who has plumbed this question very well is the aforementioned Banu Bargu. In her recent book *Starve and Immolate*, Bargu writes about what she calls *necroresistance*, "a form of *refusal* against simultaneously individualizing and totalizing domination that acts by wrenching the power of life and death away from the apparatuses of the modern state in which this power is conventionally vested."[48]

Bargu's book deals with the so-called Death Fasters in Turkey, a group of prisoners in the early 2000s who used their own bodies—even to the point of causing their own deaths in the process—to resist the state. Bargu anchors her reading in the work of Foucault—with some help from Deleuze—and Agamben, although she is quite critical of both, especially the latter. She focuses on the conditions of biopolitics and

47. Robert Cover, "Violence and the Word," in *Narrative, Violence and the Law: The Essays of Robert Cover*, ed. Martha Minow, Michael Ryan, and Austin Sarat (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 203.

48. Banu Bargu, *Starve and Immolate: The Politics of Human Weapons* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 27.

the way that its related condition of *biosovereignty* (which determines which lives are worth protecting and which lives are not) threatens to structure and control the human body in an unprecedented way.

For Bargu, although Foucault offers a good foundation for the effects of state power, biopolitics, and neoliberalism (ideas I will revisit in chapter 4, along with a continued discussion about the Death Fasters), "[he] does not pay sufficient attention to how the body, objectified by the operations of power, can also be countermobilized and transformed into an instrument that can be used against the state."[49] Bargu acknowledges that Foucault has understood the ways that under conditions of biopolitics, both governmentality and its resistance have become increasingly "preoccupied with life."[50] Yet—with the possible exception of his thoughts on the revolution in Iran—Bargu argues that Foucault offers only the sketchiest understandings of the tactics, motives, and effects of such forms of resistance. (She notes, for example, that his descriptions of prison revolts "are not analyzed to draw out an autonomous logic of their own" but are rather subsumed to his larger theory of the operations of power and resistance more generally.)[51]

Bargu also critiques Agamben's notion of *homo sacer*, arguing that Agamben effectively merges the various forms of resistance he describes (the comatose patient, the *Muselmann*, stateless refugees, etc.) into one seamless whole where no particularity, no distinction, no differing tactics are allowed for. Furthermore, she argues that Agamben's concept of inoperativity (which she calls "passive refusal") does not allow for the kinds of active and effective stances that the Death Fasters took, to give just one—albeit critical—example.[52] Bargu writes:

> Resistance in Agamben's work is transformed into passive contemplation, a stubborn yet inactive refusal rather than any active resistance or revolutionary, transformative politics . . . Agamben's theory takes away the counterpower that Foucault grants to every subject. The homo sacer may want to resist sovereignty, but, it seems, the Life inhering in

49. Ibid., 59.

50. Ibid., 61.

51. Ibid., 59.

52. Ibid., 76.

him, as the subject-object of history, is destined to remain bound to its creator—sovereignty.[53]

In general, Bargu's criticism of the existing literature is that it fails to allow for the varied and critical tactics that have emerged from various historical and geographic moments and localities. Bargu draws upon the work of Achille Mbembe to argue that even as biosovereignty produces what he calls "necropolitical spaces"—that is, zones where subjects are reduced to the status of the "living dead"—a corresponding possibility of necroresistance emerges as a response to and a refusal of that power.[54] (I will also return to Mbembe's work in chapter 4.)

In thinking about the power of necroresistance with her description of the Death Fasters, Bargu helps fill the gaps in Foucault's theory. Rather than joining Agamben in favoring (albeit in a complex way) the reduction of the subject to bare life, Bargu claims that "necroresistance is carried out not to embrace bare life, even if to upend it, but as a struggle not to be reduced to bare life."[55] Bargu argues that in performing a preference for death to bare life, the Death Fasters "oppose . . . the valorization of survival over political existence, thereby defying the logic of the production of life by sovereignty."[56]

The Death Fasters, facing a biopolitical regime in Turkey that sought to create "supermax" prisons modeled on those in the United States, turned to hunger strikes to reject the kind of "life" they were being led toward. In doing so, they managed to turn the heart of the carceral system, normally understood as the acme of sovereign authority—particularly over the bodies of its subjects—into a center of resistance. Furthermore, by engaging in acts of violence turned only against themselves, the hunger strikers complicated the state's easy use of the term *terrorism* (although the state still used that language in reference to them), which has become the standby term for any opposition to state or biopolitical control.

The state, as part of its response, orchestrated "Operation Return to Life," wherein it invaded its own prisons in order to "save" the

53. Ibid., 77.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid., 81.

56. Ibid.

prisoners' lives. Tellingly, the government spoke of "saving terrorists from their own terror."[57] In response:

> . . . finding themselves in conditions of asymmetric warfare, prisoners responded by piling up their beds, chairs, lockers, personal belongings, and the LPG [liquid petroleum gas] tanks used for cooking in the communal kitchens as barricades to block the entry of soldiers into their wards. They manufactured gas masks from plastic water bottles, fought back with weapons of their own making from pieces of furniture, and set their bodies on fire.[58]

Even when some of the hunger strikers were hospitalized, force-fed, and given IVs, they would try to pull out their feeding instruments whenever they were conscious and unbound. Other prisoners who were relocated remained on hunger strike, and some of them actually managed to get "compassionate" releases. But other prisoners starved themselves to death. In all, 122 prisoners died from suicide, self-starvation, or self-immolation—or were killed by the state (or by prison doctors through negligence).[59]

The asymmetry of the battle perhaps would suggest that the Death Fasters were doomed from the outset, but to think that way reinforces the very conceptions of power and sovereignty—and, in particular, biosovereignty—that the Death Fasters were opposing. As Bargu asserts, the fact that this struggle happened at all in the veritable "belly of the beast," in some of the most secure prisons in a state that was (and remains) fully devoted to biopolitical power, shows the way that the body remains available to thwart sovereignty (and perhaps more specifically biosovereignty) at its very core. In the same way that the unburied dead body is the ultimate sign of both state power and its greatest vulnerability, so too here, in the case of the Death Fasters, the expression of state power is met at the same exact moment by a force of equivalence, a denial of the state's power over these lives.

Bargu's depiction of the Death Fasters and their hunger strike suggests what Benjamin thought about the general strike; both forms of strike refuse any accommodation, any treating or negotiating with the

57. Ibid., 150.

58. Ibid., 150–51.

59. Ibid., 209.

powers that be. Both offer a definitive no to the false authority and mythic violence that seek to control and dominate through either the market, in the case of the general strike, or the prisoner's actual bodies, in the case of the hunger strike. And in that utter defiance we see the ground for the state's undoing, as well as the undoing of archism more generally. The state needs its opponents to resist it in terms that it has already mastered. If they call for "human rights" as a response to the state, if they lead with their own status as victims of a powerful state, then they are dealing with a language of phantasm and false authority that the state is superbly adapted toward dominating. As Benjamin notes (via Sorel), the usual political strike is also just a case of the workers trying to beat the state at its own game, blackmailing the state with yet more mythic violence to get this or that accommodation. And when it comes to threats and blackmailing, here too it is the state that has all the advantages.

Ultimately, Benjamin suggests, the workers can't win this way. By acquiescing to the general principles of market capitalism, they surrender themselves to a system devoted to their exploitation. Furthermore, by engaging in a political strike, they are merely responding to the mythic violence of the state with mythic violence of their own (and the state will always be a master of such clashes insofar as it is purely a mythic creature). The general strike—and by extension the hunger strike—are, on the other hand, nonviolent in the sense that they do not engage in projection or phantasms of authority. This is not to say that these strikers partake in "truth" or "reality" in a way that the state or the workers engaging in the political strike do not but only to suggest that general and hunger strikes serve to deny and render ineffective all that projection. The general strike does this by exposing the vulnerabilities of capitalism and by withdrawing workers from a phantasmic economy. The Death Fasters' hunger strike does this by using the prisoners' own bodies as a material form of resistance to the illusions of absolute state power.

Finally, and perhaps most critically, insofar as archism itself is above all a way of controlling and determining life (and both denying and instrumentalizing death for its own purposes), the Death Fasters radically subvert that power by turning to death itself as a kind of

collaborator against archist hegemony. In this way, they get at the violent root of archist authority and turn it against its erstwhile master. The ideas of necropolitics and necroresistance that Bargu describes suggest that not just their bodies but death itself—usually the key means by which state and archist power is wielded—becomes instead a resource for resistance that the state and other biopolitical forces can never take away. Bargu's work suggests that one does not have to be dead to exert this form of power. Her work suggests a connection between the power of the dead and the power of the living, particularly in a case like this, where the liminality between death and life is at its most porous (as van Gennep notes as well).

Rather than a clear division between the living and the dead, I see instead a continuum of conditions: from the actually dead, to the near dead, to the Death Faster, to the refugee, and so forth. All these states in some way partake in death, whether actual death or the deep precarity that ensues from being stateless. Each of these conditions may well, as Bargu argues herself, have its own distinct expression of resistance, its own tactics, its own possibilities. But they also share one thing in common: all these states of being expose something that is always the case for all of us, regardless of our condition—namely, the falseness of projections of power and authority that normally don't even register as such and especially the false promise of dominating, and perhaps ultimately eliminating, death that lies at the heart of archism and liberal universalism alike.

To put ourselves in a position to learn from the dead, to let death affect us while we are alive, is to enhance and expand upon this kind of knowledge (or, as I'll argue in the conclusion, a form of "unknowledge" or authority that the dead provide us with). The dead can be comrades to the living, in effect fighting alongside them with a common enemy. And, I would hasten to add, this need not only be the case for those who are literally at the door of death; not just the *Muselmann* and the Death Fasters but people who are very much alive—and planning to stay that way for the time being; such people can also allow themselves to be affected by the dead and learn from them how better to resist the mythic violence that surrounds us and seeks to determine whether we are dead, alive, or in between.

At the same time, I'd like to make a claim—which I will expand upon in later chapters—that although perhaps part of a continuum, there is nonetheless a critical difference between being "nearly" and actually dead. The near dead, because they are also partially alive, are more susceptible to phantasm and projection; they are much more "one of us" than "one of them" (i.e., the dead). The kind of unagentic agency I am ascribing to the dead, their "authority," comes from the fact that they are actually and fully dead. This distinction will become clearer as I develop it further. I mention it here because I don't want to leave the impression that there is no difference between a dead body and a comatose body, between an unburied corpse and the kind of "walking dead" we find in the example of the *Muselmann* (or also in terms of the idea of "social death" and the black subject, which I will discuss in chapter 4).

In the next two chapters, I will expand on the idea of necroresistance by looking at literary examples that contend with why the state treats dead bodies the way it does and how that treatment can further be resisted, how allowing the dead to influence us can become—even as it has also always been—a form of politics and an anarchist way (or form) of life.

Chapter Two
Classical Readings of the Unburied Body

In this chapter and the next, I will turn to a mix of works of literature, theory, and epic narratives in order to shed further light on the power and nature of the dead, particularly in terms of the unburied dead body. Literature and its related genres are a useful, and I would say critical, way of thinking about the subversive power of the unburied dead. Although the stories depicted are fictitious (with the exception of a story told by Machiavelli and also one by James Baldwin, which, although fictional, surely corresponds quite closely to actual cases of lynching), this does not mean that what they have to convey remains purely in the province of fiction. Literature allows us to express complex ideas without the requirement of conformity to norms that usually accompanies "true" accounts. Liberated from this burden, literary treatments can express more subversive and otherwise unthinkable thoughts without threat, and as Maria Aristodemou reveals, literature touches on what Lacan calls "the Real"—that is, the unsaid and unread danger that lies beneath the surface of life's frenzied dance of denial.[1] In this way, literature may be a particularly suitable medium through which to talk about death and, more particularly, unburied dead bodies. Perhaps most critically, literature, which is itself invented, may best describe and expose the power of projection and phantasm that determines what otherwise passes as reality (a reality dead bodies work to contest).

The fact that an unburied dead body fills us with such horror suggests our need to quickly reject such an image, returning it to whence

1. See Maria Aristodemou, *Law, Psychoanalysis, Society: Taking the Unconscious Seriously* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).

it came. Many people can only look at the images of Alan Kurdi or Michael Brown for a short moment before attempting to turn them into something they can live with (or ignore or forget). As Jill Stauffer writes in her book *Ethical Loneliness*, it is possible to listen and not hear what someone is saying. Stauffer looked at many truth and reconciliation commissions (in South Africa, Rwanda, and other places) and other accounts of various atrocities and found that if listeners—including judges and other figures of authority—are unwilling to shatter their own feelings of safety and wholeness to hear the story of someone else's violation, they can sit in front of that person as he or she talks but won't take in what is said.[2] Such an inability to hear actually constitutes a form of refusal, leading to what Stauffer calls "ethical loneliness."

The same thing can be said of seeing. We can see the unburied body, but we don't want to take it in. We resist such an image because it potentially shatters our sense of protection (protection by sovereign power, more specifically). Perhaps we look at it because we think we should, but we don't necessarily see what it is showing us (maybe looking vs. seeing expresses the same concept as the listening/hearing binary that Stauffer employs so well in her work). In this way, we cannot look death in the face; we do not want to believe in it, so we turn to the state and other biopolitical actors in the hopes that they can deliver on their promise to both determine and control (but hence preserve) our lives. Faced with a dead body, especially one not in a controlled environment (like a funeral), we will it away as if the act of looking or not looking spells all the difference between acknowledging and denying human mortality.

It is also the case that one's reception of an image of a dead body changes radically depending on what kind of body and what kind of viewer is involved. White people may well see the image of Michael Brown and think "That's not me" or even "I am being protected by such acts." Yet, as I will argue further in chapter 4, it actually takes a lot of work not to see any dead body as suggesting one's own mortality (or the mortality of loved ones). Thus even though the reactions to the

2. Jill Stauffer, *Ethical Loneliness: The Injustice of Not Being Heard* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

sight of a dead body may vary widely, there is a way in which that body never ceases to be a threat to the desire to master and vanquish death.

Literature allows us to do an end-run around the sorts of defense mechanisms described above. We can dwell on images and moments we might otherwise move quickly away from in our actual lives. Literature, if it's good (and sometimes even if it isn't), can make us remain somewhere and dwell on what we ordinarily would do anything not to see or hear or think; the screen of fiction itself provides this opportunity. And this goes beyond merely encountering an unpleasant image like a dead body; even more pointedly, literature can also make us dwell on the ways that, despite the promises of capitalism, sovereign states, rights discourse, and the like (and all the promises of archism itself), we remain highly vulnerable, mortal, and all-too-human creatures.

For these reasons, in this chapter, I will look at two instances of ancient Greek narratives of unburied dead bodies, beginning with Homer's *Iliad* and his rendering of the death and struggle over the dead body of Patroclus, a hero of Achaea, followed by his description of the death of Hector, the beloved and beautiful son of Priam, the king of Troy. I will then look at *Antigone* and its own treatment of the unburied dead (and also the way that treatment led to catastrophic results for the sovereign order Creon tried to impose on Antigone and her family).

Since this is not a book about ancient Greece and its ideas about death, the purpose of these readings is to set up and illuminate some ideas at the core of this treatise. My argument (sometimes engaged with through contemporary writers) is that these texts tell us something about the relationship between the living and the dead that pertains even in situations far removed from the time of Homer and the time of Sophocles. However, one critical difference between these works and the modern forms I look at in chapter 3 is that the Greek stories relate to states only, to kings and queens and acts of violence committed by armies under the command of military and political leaders. If Foucault is correct, the Greeks preceded (by two thousand years) the advent of biopolitics and, in a way, even the medieval form of sovereignty that coexists uneasily with biopolitics to this day. In this way, by looking at ancient Greek literature, we can examine a purer

form of archism, one that adheres quite closely to the state it authorizes. Things get more complicated in later iterations of archism; we get racist mobs and disciplinarity, governmentality, and also still states and even kings and queens (or, in Machiavelli's terms, at least princes). I would be loath to say that the ancient Greek experience of archism represents some kind of "good old days," since I think archism is awful in all its myriad forms, but at least we can begin with a less convoluted story and see archism's workings without the disguises that it later adopts (disguises that permit us, for example, to think of human rights and the state as coming from two opposed camps).

After looking at these two Greek examples, I will continue this investigation of what literature can tell us about the relationship between the living and the dead and, in particular, the unburied dead in chapter 3. There, I will look at three "modern" examples (I use scare quotes because one of them is really early modern) by Machiavelli, Kafka, and Baldwin. Reading these stories in tandem allows us to gain an understanding of why states and political actors more generally are driven to desecrate corpses as well as what resources these very same corpses offer the would-be resister of sovereign authority. Recognizing that notions like sovereignty are only very loosely applied when discussing Greek city-states and modern nations at the same time (although for Agamben, for one, this comparison is appropriate), I would nonetheless like to treat these various cases as speaking to a similar phenomenon. Even if the form of that phenomenon has varied dramatically over the course of centuries, some critical factors pertain to all of these examples. In all cases, we are dealing with states (or later, other biopolitical actors), and we are dealing with (dead and unburied) bodies. In all cases, we see expressions of an intense, almost obsessive fascination with the dead bodies the state or other actors have killed and displayed (or that the state has sought to protect and has lost custody of). In all cases, we see how the display of the unburied dead leads to less rather than more security for the state or the ruling authority, a further exposure of its vulnerability. Thus for all the ways states and other forms of political (and biopolitical) authority have changed, their engagement with and requirement for the unburied dead has not, and this is the dimension I would like to explore in order to think about the political upshot of this

long practice. Therefore, let me now turn first to the *Iliad* and then to *Antigone* to see how classical treatments of the unburied dead illuminate an understanding of necroresistance.

The Bodies of Patroclus and Hector

In the *Iliad*, we see two key instances in which a dead body becomes an object of projections of state authority. In the first instance, the Trojans slay Patroclus, a squire to and close friend of Achilles, one of the key mainland Greek military leaders. The second involves the slaying and desecration of Hector, a prince of Troy. In both cases, the hero's death is followed by an intense struggle over the treatment of his corpse (and an equally intense effort on the part of each hero's fellow countrymen to rescue him).

At the time of his killing, Patroclus is wearing divine armor that belongs to Achilles himself. Once he is dead, a struggle arises over both Patroclus's body and his armor. Menelaus, the king of Sparta and Achilles's ally, goes to retrieve his body for the Achaeans (the mainland Greeks), but Hector, the son of Priam, comes to seize the body for himself, driving Menelaus away. Of this moment, Homer writes, "Hector was tugging at the body of Patroclus. He had stripped him of his noble armor and now he wanted to behead him with his sharp sword, drag off the trunk, and give it to the dogs of Troy."[3] Later, as the battle continues to rage back and forth, the goddess Athena descends to revive and shore up the Achaeans. She tells Menelaus, "It is you, Menelaus, who will bear the blame and the disgrace, if nimble dogs are allowed to maul the friend of proud Achilles [i.e., Patroclus] under the walls of Troy."[4]

Here we see echoes of the state's existential anxiety, which Benjamin depicts in his own writing. Patroclus (and Hector in turn, as I will show), upon being killed, becomes a highly fraught and (to cite Harrison) charismatic symbol of state authority. The fact that these events occur under conditions of war means that there are two state interests in contention (along with a plethora of gods lined up on one side or the other). The frenzy with which both sides seek to protect their own

3. Homer, *The Iliad* (New York: Penguin, 1950), 319.

4. Ibid., 331.

corpses and desecrate the others' suggests how much is riding on what otherwise seems to be a purely symbolic exchange. Symbolic it may be, but here, as Benjamin suggests, the symbol takes on a central and critical role; it bears the existential anxiety of both the Achaeans and the Trojans as well as the vulnerability of those states. For them, the urge to retrieve or desecrate the body (depending on which side and which body we are talking about) is fundamental.

During the battle over Patroclus's body, a tremendous anxiety affects the Achaeans, who worry about the fate of that body and the way Patroclus's body is somehow very closely tied to the fate of the Achaeans in general and the fate of the war with Troy in particular. The Trojans are portrayed as being no less eager to keep Patroclus's body out of Achaean hands:

> The bronze-clad Achaeans felt that it would be a disgrace to their name to fall back on the hollow ships. "Friends," they said among themselves, "if we let the horse-taming Trojans drag this body off in triumph to their town, the best thing that could happen would be that the black earth should swallow us, here where we stand." And on their side the gallant Trojans felt the same. "Comrades," said one of them, "even if all of us are destined to be killed beside this corpse, let none retire."[5]

Before he is himself killed in single-hand combat with Achilles, Hector tries to make a pact with the Achaean leader that whoever of the two of them is killed, his armor will be stripped but his body will be returned to his own community. But Achilles rebuffs that suggestion, saying, "Lions do not come to terms with men, nor does the wolf see eye to eye with the lamb—they are enemies to the end. It is the same with you and me."[6] As the fight proceeds, Achilles even rejects the dying Hector's request to ransom back his body to his family. Achilles says cruelly, "I only wish that I could summon up the appetite to carve and eat you raw myself, for what you have done to me. But this at least is certain, that nobody is going to keep the dogs from you."[7] Hector's last words are an appeal to heaven so that "the angry gods remember how you treated me."[8] Not unlike the supernatural forces that Antigone herself

5. Ibid., 327.

6. Ibid., 404.

7. Ibid., 406.

8. Ibid.

appeals to in order to justify burying her brother, Hector uses his last breath to invoke eternal laws that should not be violated (although, in doing so, he seems to forget that the gods themselves are at war with one another over this issue and that Athena, for one, is strongly partisan against Troy). Ignoring his pleas and oaths, Achilles proceeds to desecrate Hector's body, attaching it to his chariot and dragging it along in his wake (and then submitting it to further indignities when he arrives at the Achaean camp).

Some of this obsession with the fate of a dead body may be specific to the Greek society at the time Homer was writing the *Iliad*. In *The Greek Way of Death*, Robert Garland tells us that "denial of the rite of burial constituted an act of *hybris* against the dead."[9] More generally, he says that in Homer, the dead required certain protections and were vulnerable because they were seen as being without strength and furthermore without their wits (with the exception of Tiresias the prophet after he dies). The problem with desecration of the dead, then, stems not from a fear of what the dead person him- or herself will do but from what the treatment of his or her body means for the living community. Garland writes, "It is true that on one occasion the poet [i.e., Homer] suggests that it is safer to respect the needs of the dead and accord them proper burial . . . but even then the failure to do so arouses the vengeance (*nemesis*) of the gods, not that of the dead man himself."[10]

Although not the subject of fear (Garland also says there is no mention of a hygienic reason for burial), the ancient Greeks had many concerns about the dead as such. The dead who were unburied were called *ataphoi* (those without a place) and were seen as being prevented entry into Hades.[11] To avoid such a fate, even a light burial with a sprinkling of dirt was thought to suffice (that is what Antigone was able to do—twice, actually—for Polynices).

Garland's explanation for the position of the dead in Homeric Greek literature helps us understand the broad parameters of concern, but

9. Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 8.

10. Ibid., 1. At the same time, Garland does suggest that the Greeks feared the dead as a source of pollution and took certain ritual motions to guard against them (ibid., 45–46). It's also the case that Patroclus appeared as a phantom to Achilles, asking him to bury him so that he could go to Hades.

11. Ibid., 101–3.

it does not inform us all that much about the politics of death and, in particular, the politics of death under conditions of war. In his well-known study of the *Iliad* and the treatment of dead bodies (and, in particular, the dead bodies of great heroes), Jean-Pierre Vernant helps explain some of the more bizarre aspects we see in Homer, particularly the desire to have dogs eat the corpses and even Achilles's frustration at his own inability to eat Hector's dead body. Vernant writes that in Homeric Greece, the ultimate ideal was to die a "beautiful death" (*kalos thanatos*).[12] This death involves deliberately choosing a short but heroic life over a long and ordinary one. (Achilles himself is the paradigmatic figure for such a choice in that, in his case, his choice was actual and presented to him through divine intervention.)

To die a beautiful death was seen by the Greeks as a way to cheat death. It deprived death of a chance to age and ruin the body even before the moment of death itself. (Perhaps here we are already seeing how archism, even in such a different form, is oriented toward denying death—although in this case, the life that it offers instead is far different than it will be for the biopolitical model, where life is to be extended and protected at all costs). The hero who died nobly in battle was seen as perpetually youthful—even if his chronological age was not that young—and was to be memorialized forever by virtue of his great deeds, hence achieving a degree of immortality.

Vernant also informs us that whereas in Sparta, all the soldiers—very much including those who survive the war—were thought to partake in the glory created by some heroic soldiers dying in battle, in Athens, a beautiful death pertained to the hero alone and set him above everyone else.[13]

Because of the honor and respect given to the beautiful death, there was an equivalent desire on the part of enemies to deprive one another of this death, seeking instead to disgrace and ruin the dead body in a very extreme and very public way. Thus Vernant writes,

12. Jean-Pierre Vernant, "A 'Beautiful Death' and the Disfigured Corpse in Homeric Epic," in *Mortals and Immortals: Collected Essays*, ed. Jean-Pierre Vernant and Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 50. For another important text on the dead and their treatment in the *Iliad*, see Nathan Arrington, *Ashes, Images, and Memories: The Presence of the War Dead in Fifth-Century Athens* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

13. Vernant, "Beautiful Death," 65.

> It is no longer enough to triumph in a lawful duel, to confirm one's own *arête* over another's; with the opponent dead, one attacks his corpse, as predator does its prey. Since the victor can not fulfill the formulaic wish to devour the body raw, he dismembers and consumes through the mediation of dogs and birds. Thus the epic hero is doubly threatened with the loss of his humanity; if the hero dies, his body might be given over to the beasts, not in a beautiful death, but in that nightmarish horror described by Priam [which involves leaving an old and ugly corpse, as I will discuss further]. All this is true enough, but we must ask whether the link is not even tighter between the heroic ideal and the mutilation of the corpse; does not the hero's beautiful death, which grants him eternal glory, have as its necessary corollary, its sinister obverse, the disfigurement and debasement of the dead opponent's body, so as to deny him access to the memory of men to come? If, in the heroic point of view, staying alive means little compared with dying well, the same perspective shows that the most important is not to kill ones enemy but to deprive him of a beautiful death.[14]

Vernant's essay helps us understand the terror that the Greeks (Achaeans and Trojans alike) felt at the spectacle of such an ignoble death. As he explains, if a beautiful death is the ideal, its opposite is worse than a normal death; it renders the hero's sacrifice irrelevant. It seems no desecration is odious enough to satisfy the desire to debase and dominate the enemy corpse. For this reason, the corpse (first the body of Patroclus and then the body of Hector in this specific case) is a site of intense struggle and violence, not only physically (because both armies are trying to destroy one body as they try to retrieve and defend another), but also semiotically.

The hero's corpse is thus the site both where state power is asserted and where it can be exposed and denied. In such stories, amid all the battles over the bodies of the dead, it is not too far a stretch, especially when reading this through a Benjaminian lens, to infer once again not the power of the state but its weakness, its dependence on what seems to be merely a sign of its power to be read and responded to in a particular way.

The frenzy and passion associated with these dead bodies suggest not domination but, once again, anxiety. It is not that Achilles merely wants Patroclus's body to be properly disposed of; he *needs* it to be. And just as strongly, he needs Hector's body to be desecrated. Amid his violent personal emotions (he loves Patroclus and dearly craves revenge)

14. Ibid., 67.

is the political question for Achilles as well; the authority of the Achaeans has come into conflict with that of Troy, and only one authority structure can survive this contest. This naked political question seems to come down to who controls the dead bodies that are a result of the war (and especially of two particular bodies: those of Patroclus and Hector).[15] In this way, it becomes a contest once again over death. Who is reduced to death, and who gets to transcend it?

The way that Achilles keeps coming up with further degradations (later, he has Hector's corpse covered with animal blood and has his soldiers take turns stabbing his dead body) indicates a kind of bottomless desire to hurt, degrade, and punish, pointing to an insatiable need to demonstrate his power—and by extension the political authority he is invested with. At no point, it appears, is his anxiety sated or his desire to demonstrate authority and power finally expressed. Achilles's statement that he wishes he could "summon up the appetite" to eat Hector's corpse indicates that the degradations to which he would subject Hector go beyond his capabilities; in the face of a need that can never be met, the imagination moves beyond the self's ability to project that authority, power, and dominance. One suspects that even if Achilles had found a way to eat Hector's dead body, some other, deeper form of degradation would be denied to him instead. Necropolitical violence, the need to degrade the enemy's body, is limitless because it is empty, without any basis in material reality. Here the material (dead) body cannot suffer enough to appease the need to dominate and control it in every possible way, and thus that very same materiality can be said to defy the projection of state power (and its control over the nature and manner of death) it is meant to support.

15. Garland offers a few examples of historical wars when leaving the enemy dead unburied was seriously considered. He writes, "Only in exceptional cases do we learn that the right [to burial] was denied, as after the battle of Delion in 424 when the Boetians initially refused to return the Athenian dead on the grounds that they had occupied a sanctuary in the course of the campaign. It is conceivable that the Athenians denied burial to the Persians after the battle of Marathon, for although they claimed to have honoured their enemy dead, Pausanias was unable to find the grave. But the possibility that the Athenians simply chose not to mark the spot cannot be ruled out." Garland, *Greek*, 101.

The Beauty of Hector

The obsession with the treatment of corpses in the *Iliad* is not all negative and desperate, however. Another critical thing to note is the way the text describes how beautiful Hector is in life and death alike, but especially in death. Vernant alludes to this when he writes,

> During the course of a battle, a warrior may have seemed to become a menace, a terror, or comfort, occasioning panic or flight, or inspiring courage and attack. Lying on the battlefield, however, he is exposed as a simple figure with identifiable attributes: this is truly Patroklos, and this Hektor, but reduced to their external appearance, to the unique look of their bodies that enables others to recognize them. For the living man, of course, an imposing presence, grace, and beauty have their place as elements of personality, but for the warrior in action, such attributes are eclipsed by those highlighted by battle. What shines from the body of the hero is less the charming glow of youth (*chariestatē hēbē*) than the sheen of the bronze he is wearing, the flash of the sword and breastplate, the glitter of his eyes, the radiance of the ardor that fires him.[16]

In other words, the beauty implicit in the idea of a "beautiful death" is a production of that death itself, a way the body becomes seen as being more than itself when it dies in particular ways. His physical beauty as a living person notwithstanding, Hector's beauty as a corpse is, in a sense, unrelated to and far surpassing those attributes while he lived. His beauty even seems to survive, at least to some extent, the initial attempts to spoil it. When Achilles attaches Hector's dead body to his chariot, Homer writes, "Dragged behind him, Hector raised a cloud of dust, his black locks streamed on either side, and dust fell thick upon his head, so comely once, which Zeus now let his enemies defile on his own native soil."[17] Hector's beautiful long, dark hair competes with the dust to define and determine who Hector was and, in a sense, still is; we can see elements of a belief that in some way, Hector can transcend not only death but even the materiality of the body in his personification of a beautiful death.

Even as the heroic death produces a transcendent beauty, as Vernant also notes, an astounding ugliness can also come to be reflected on the corpse, an ugliness that surpasses anything while the subject is alive.

16. Vernant, "Beautiful Death," 62–63.

17. Homer, *Iliad*, 407–8.

When Hector announces his plan to fight Achilles in single combat, his father, Priam, beseeches him not to. He says that such an act would lead to the doom not only of Hector himself but of all of Troy. He ends his speech with a seemingly strange comment:

> Last of all my turn will come to fall to the sharp bronze, and when someone's javelin or sword has laid me dead, I shall be torn to pieces by ravening dogs at my own street door. The very dogs I have fed at table and trained to watch my gate will loll about in front of [my dead body], maddened by their master's blood. Ah, it looks well enough for a young man killed in battle to lie there with his wounds upon him: death can find nothing to expose in him that is not beautiful. But when an old man is killed and dogs defile his grey head, his grey beard and his privy parts, we plumb the depths of human degradation.[18]

This is the nightmare scenario Vernant references in an earlier quote as well. Vernant writes further that "a bloody death is beautiful and glorious when it strikes a hero in the fullness of youth; it raises him above the human condition and saves him from common death by conferring prime luster on his demise. The same kind of death for an old man, drops him beneath the level of humanity and changes his end from a shared fate into a horrible monstrosity."[19] Since Priam is the king, revealing his wizened old body naked and broken will inevitably show the truth about Troy—that it is ruled by an old, enfeebled, gray-haired man. In life, he may be able to adorn himself in regal symbols, but in death, all is revealed; his fleshy remains will betray the authority it was meant to bear.

But does that mean that Hector himself demonstrates the opposite effect? Perhaps if the body is young and beautiful, the exposure of weakness that Priam worries about is not so much of a danger. Perhaps a beautiful corpse, produced via a beautiful death, can actually enforce and seal the veracity of sovereign authority. The desire to prevent this from happening may explain Achilles's urge to defile Hector's body as much as possible; Hector's beauty—*especially* as a corpse—seems to countermand the failure of authority that would be readily displayed if an old, unattractive person was killed and left naked instead. By dragging Hector's black hair in the dust, stabbing him, and adorning

18. Ibid., 398–99.

19. Vernant, "Beautiful Death," 64.

him with animal blood, Achilles seeks to convey the same collapse of authority that Priam feared in terms of his own corpse. The fact that Homer notes Hector's now-dusty hair and his being dragged naked occur "on his own native soil" indicates the importance of this moment for the questions of political authority that unburied bodies bring up more generally. Achilles must render that failure legible even upon a body that appears to resist such a narrative.

Yet what Achilles doesn't understand or doesn't want to admit is that the exposure of the failure of authority he is producing (or perhaps more accurately, rendering visible) in Hector extends to himself as well. In this battle over bodies near the apex of the Trojan War and toward the very end of the *Iliad*, both sides attempt to expose the other as fraudulent, as empty and without true authority. Perhaps the greatest crime of this war, from the position of a would-be sovereign authority, is that in their desire to defeat the other, both sides rendered the inherent vulnerability of all forms of sovereignty and archism readily apparent even as they hoped that such a message could only be read in the dead bodies of their enemies. Instead, the death and failure the individual sides sought to ascribe to corpses of the vanquished point to their own death, to their own nonbeing, even as they posture and frenetically assert the opposite.

In other words, the transcendent beauty—as well as ugliness—that can come with a violent death in battle points, in a way, to its own invented nature. With sovereign authority comes a desire for a kind of epistemological absolute wherein the very conveyers of that certitude are simultaneously revealing and performing their exalted status. The fact that a dead body becomes *more beautiful* than when it was alive is a demonstration and exposure of the way that this kind of projection functions, how it becomes unmoored from its own material referents. Here a process that is ubiquitous but not meant to be recognized (or to be "misrecognized," as Althusser claims) becomes too magnificent to be naturalized (indeed, it is meant to be *super*natural).[20]

Accordingly, rather than attesting that this dead body now *really is* more beautiful, a tangible embodiment of the ambition and desire of

20. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and the State," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 116.

the state that the hero died for, this phenomenon just as easily could be read as attesting to the nonexistence of the very object that this superhuman beauty seeks to attest to; in its superhuman and hence disembodied form, it becomes visible *as* phantasm. The frailty and the vulnerability of the corpse, the ways it can be defiled, and even its inherent ugliness come to challenge the supposed sublime status it becomes (in this case) conferred with. Above all, there is a time limit on the corpse's supernatural beauty; as it begins to rot, it quickly becomes impossible to see it as being *more* beautiful than when that person was alive.[21] Indeed, it soon becomes impossible to read it as being beautiful (with all the political connotations with which such aesthetic value is laden) at all.

Vernant points out that in the end, all the great heroes depicted as dying in the *Iliad* are ultimately rescued from ignominy by divine intervention.[22] This may be Homer's way of trying to assuage his fellow Greeks, offering that a beautiful death comes with its own guarantee, that the gods themselves served to support and render true and evident the surfeit of beauty that such a death produced. But whether this is intended or not, the text of the *Iliad* serves to undermine as much as it serves to promote sovereign authority. In this way, it reminds me very much of Benjamin's study of the German baroque dramatists, who also may well have sought to portray sovereign authority but inadvertently undermined that authority in the telling of those stories through their plays; the contested nature of the story guarantees that for every attempt to portray the corpse as beautiful and perfect, there is a counternarrative meant to do precisely the opposite.

The ambivalence demonstrated through these depictions can never be resolved, and the site of that irresolution is, once again, the dead and unburied bodies themselves. For all the keen tension over *this* body versus *that* body (a subject I will return to shortly), unburied bodies represent a general field of struggle that does not readily lend itself to

21. There is an exception to this point in terms of divine intervention. Vernant reminds us that although Achilles worried about just this outcome, his mother, who was herself divine, infused Patroclus's body with ambrosia and nectar so that it stayed fresh and untouched for a full year. When they finally could retrieve the body, it was exactly like the day he was killed. Vernant, "Beautiful Death," 73.

22. Ibid.

the wishes and power of either side or the unproblematic promulgation of sovereign authority and power in general.

To look at this intense fetishization of the dead body also indicates one further critical insight, already alluded to: the fact that mortality and death have been deemed conquerable (through the recourse of state action). Although, as already noted, this promise will take radically different forms at different moments in its development between ancient Greece and the modern biopolitical state, I would suggest that archism might begin (appropriately enough, since the term comes from the Greek verb *archein*, which has connotations of both ruling and beginning anew) with this promise. At its core, archism seems to offer the ability to show that although human beings are natural creatures, doomed to die, it is possible, whether literally or symbolically, to transcend death, ugliness, and the very fleshiness of life. This promise is implicit in the concept of a "beautiful death," and I see this as suggesting a genealogy for later liberal forms of archism as well, including, as I will describe in some detail, the archism of white supremacy, wherein a version of the same promise is extended to the white community as a whole.

In all cases, archism "achieves" this promise by exporting death and ugliness to some other, whether an enemy soldier in this case or people of color in the modern version of this story. Besides the question of the nature of life in the face of a "beautiful death" (to be readily given up for the Greeks and to be prolonged at all costs for the later biopolitical iteration), there is one more critical difference to note: While in the Greek version of this story, the beautiful death is only available to the hero, to the unitary heart of archist power, in its more modern biopolitical form, archism extends that promise and that possibility, as just noted, to entire communities of those whom it deems worthy. If it is difficult to secure transcendent beauty even in a figure such as Hector, the attempt to pronounce, if not achieve, its possibility for an entire population indicates how even as archism has manifested itself in increasingly violent ways, it also is even more vulnerable and exposed as phantasm in our own time.

Polynices and Antigone

By far the most famous classical rendering of an unburied body is the story of Polynices in Sophocles's *Antigone*. This play has received an enormous (and excellent) amount of scholarly attention. Two of the central recent writings on *Antigone* are perhaps especially germane to my treatment here—namely, those of Judith Butler (in *Antigone's Claim*) and Bonnie Honig (in *Antigone, Interrupted*).

For Butler, Antigone as a character epitomizes a politics of lamentation, of precarious life. As such, Butler writes that Antigone is radically subversive to norms of sovereignty and patriarchy. In part, this is simply an effect of who she is: the product of an incestuous relationship between Oedipus and Jocasta (Oedipus's wife but also his mother, unbeknownst to either of them at the time), Antigone cannot help but subvert kinship and political models.[23] When she talks of her brother, one might assume she is speaking of Eteocles (the brother who fought with Thebes and therefore received a full and public burial) or Polynices (the brother who fought against Thebes and therefore was left to rot outside the city walls). But she could also be referencing (even if she doesn't want to be) her *other* brother—namely, Oedipus himself, who is, of course, also her father. Her "regular" brothers, Eteocles and Polynices, are *also* her uncles. Her sister, Ismene, is also her aunt, and so forth.

Antigone is radical despite herself, but she is also radical in terms of her own choices. She insists on burying her dead brother (not once but twice) and is willing to suffer and die for that. But she does not suffer in silence; she laments, loudly and publically, both what she views as the unfair treatment of her brother Polynices and her own loss of life, marriage, bearing of children, and all the benefits that come with these things. Yet she makes this choice nonetheless. In this way, Antigone can be read as resisting the effects of state power, not so much in order to return things to normal (i.e., properly burying the dead and returning to a regular—albeit regal—life), but instead to radically undermine the bases by which normativity is reckoned and projected.

23. See Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

In *Antigone, Interrupted*, which I will spend more time on, Honig chooses to focus not on the precarity of life that Antigone expresses but rather on Antigone's conspiratorial assault on sovereignty—in other words, not only her saying "no" or being subversive "by nature" but also her willed and acted undermining of the political community she is a part of. Honig reads much of Antigone's actions as a rejection of the rising mores of democratic society in Athens (although the play is set in Thebes, it was written for and seen by—at least initially—an Athenian audience). Whereas most readers see Antigone as actively hostile toward Ismene (who is generally read as being much more of a conformist to sovereign and patriarchal power), Honig sees them as engaging in a sororal conspiracy of two, secretly colluding and letting the patriarchal reading of female competition and submissiveness hide their political actions.

She could also be said to be in a kind of conspiracy with her own dead and unburied brother. In terms of Polynices's dead body, Honig notes that Antigone denies the friend/enemy distinction that Creon insists on as his justification for leaving Polynices unburied. (This also ties in with Butler's discussion in *Precarious Life* of how after 9/11, Americans reiterated a long-standing sovereign decision about which bodies are grievable and which are not.)[24] Antigone insists on burying her brother *no matter what.*

For Honig, Antigone's challenge to orthodoxy goes deep. On the one hand, there is something very old-fashioned about her. Noting that Homer treats the dead Trojans and Achaeans with equal reverence in the *Iliad*, Honig argues that by insisting on Polynices's right to burial, Antigone is reverting to a Homeric notion of the value of the dead.[25] Yet, at the same time, Honig argues that Antigone also articulates the radical incommensurability among types of dead bodies. She claims that a brother (at least when both parents are dead, as they were in her case), unlike a husband or child, cannot be replaced. Even as bodies are therefore radically equal, they are also radically unalike insofar as

24. See Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004).

25. Bonnie Honig, *Antigone, Interrupted* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 104.

the personal relationships they express cannot be reproduced. Honig writes, "When Antigone insists on the irreplaceability of Polynices, she establishes herself as one who prizes singularity over substitution."[26]

Let me dwell on that notion of singularity over substitution for a moment because I think it helps one better understand the radical and subversive power of the corpse (and in particular, in this case, the effect of that corpse on the living, the ones who are committed to that body and that death). While for Creon, Polynices's body is an insult, a reminder of a direct and brazen challenge to his sovereignty (although Polynices's "crime" was actually oriented against Eteocles and the city in general rather than Creon per se), for Antigone, this body is unique and particular. While we might be tempted to say that Antigone is simply replacing one set of projections ("enemy," "traitor," "threat") with another ("brother," "family," "kin"), I would argue via Honig that it is the very indecipherability of Polynices—his uniqueness and nonsubstitutability even as he has entered a community (the dead) to which the living actors have no access—that allows Antigone to make her break with tradition, patriarchy, and sovereign authority.

It is true (as Butler and Honig both cite) that for Lacan, Antigone herself enters into the boundary between life and death and, from that position, threatens all the categories of order and stability that nominally rule in Thebes. I do not challenge this view, but I note (as I began to with Agamben's reading of the *Muselmann* and Bargu's reading of the Death Fasters) a difference between being "nearly dead" and actually dead. It bears noting that Antigone is not actually dead until she actually dies (at which point, she effectively becomes an unburied body as well). Until then, her relationship to the dead and to the living is not quite that of a corpse, and I think this "not quite" is actually very important. As "almost dead," in a fugue state of lamentation, it is true that the subject in question is not like the living. Yet she is still actively *projecting* onto death. Perhaps her approach to death gives her insights that the rest of us do not have, but they remain insights and projections, notions that conform to this or that idea or depict this or that kind of meaning. Once she is dead, like Polynices, Antigone becomes something else: a corpse, a body that immediately ceases to project

26. Ibid., 106.

anything and instead begins to defy all forms of projection. This is once again not to deny the value of the "near dead," or the refugee, or the Death Faster, or other forms of life that approach death; it is only to point out that the dead qua dead bring something especially potent and resistant to the situation at hand.

Perhaps Antigone's own "career" as a corpse—one that she has arguably been training for all of her life—is overdetermined by the drama her death produces. When she dies, Haemon—her fiancé and Creon's son—kills himself. (He had warned Creon about this from the outset, albeit cryptically.) Dead now himself, he clings to Antigone's dead body, but Creon has Haemon separated from Antigone and "properly buried." It is not clear what ultimately happens to Antigone's body, but one can expect that she is not going to be given the full rights due to someone of her station (although perhaps she eventually will; Creon is so broken in the end that anything seems possible). Following Haemon's death, Creon's wife, Eurydice, also kills herself. In the face of all this, the ways that Antigone's own corpse may or may not affect and relate to projections of sovereignty seem overshadowed by all the other deaths, by a mechanism she set up while still very much alive.

This series of deaths can be read as a form of deployment of death against a king who would use death for his own purposes. The string of suicides set off by Antigone's decision to bury her brother effectively takes the power of death away from Creon. The deaths that follow do not "use" death; rather, they render death unavailable and useless to Creon himself. He can't stop these deaths; he can't control them. Ultimately they show how limited and petty his power and authority actually are.

Things are a bit different with Polynices's own corpse. The challenges his dead body poses to the state are of a somewhat different order, largely because of the length of time he is left unburied. Under these circumstances, his body begins to do what corpses do when they are not treated in any way: rot and decompose. Therefore, as the play moves forward, his corpse becomes increasingly mysterious and flummoxing to attempted projection. In fact, as Honig notes, although Creon's intent was to banish (shades of *Homo Sacer*) Polynices from Thebes, leaving him unburied does the opposite; not only does it give

an opportunity for Antigone (or also Ismene in Honig's reading) to bury Polynices, but pieces of his body come back to the city in the form of carrion dropped by predatory birds, causing a plague to break out in the city, which further undermines Creon's authority. The visitation of such bits and pieces of a corpse meant to be excluded is perhaps the clearest indication yet of how a body can defy the state not despite but because of the fact that it is dead and unburied.

As for Eteocles, the "good brother," he is properly buried; but as such, he hardly figures in the play at all. We are far more touched by the drama set off first by Polynices's own unburied status and then by the subsequent deaths (including Antigone's) that result from it. This too suggests that the unburied dead have the power to both move us and complicate our expectations of what happens to bodies after they die.[27]

Antigone's Power

In the face of all this, and working from Honig's reading, I would argue that Antigone (both the character and the play of that name) shows us how the living can benefit from the radical indecipherability, the failure of signs, visited on the corpse. Coming as it does from the "homeland of allegory," Polynices's body (and then the bodies of Antigone, Haemon, and Eurydice in rapid succession) thwarts attempts to control it. The image of Creon reduced to a wreck at the end of the play perhaps shows more than anything how the unburied corpse represents not just the power of the state, the archist desire to control and determine both life and death, but adversely and simultaneously its deepest vulnerability—a kind of counterpower coming from the corpse itself. Polynices dies and is unburied (or only partially buried), but it is Creon who is truly destroyed.

As Honig shows, Antigone demonstrates that the response to the unburied body need not only be lamentation. It can also be a pointed and highly contested form of politics, a different relationship to death. The idea of such a politics is not to fold death back into ordinary life—to make death bearable and understandable, which is what funerals and other forms of ritual regulation of corpses purport to do—but quite the opposite. The point is to render ordinary life impossible, to use

27. I am indebted to Bonnie Honig for this insight.

life's (and death's) own indecipherability to break apart the "obvious" and "decipherable" qualities—that is, the projections—that normally animate and order our (living) world.

Honig makes this point very clearly with her reading of Douglas Crimp's critique of the AIDS Memorial Quilt. While the Quilt might seem the height of nonoffensiveness and in some way radical in its own right (simultaneously producing a symbol of middle-American domesticity and memorializing those who have been excluded from such domesticity and thereby condemned to death), Crimp takes issue with it. As Honig tells us, "Making gay male *deaths grievable*, Crimp worries contra Butler [who has her own reading of the matter] *avant la letter* we might say, is less an achievement than making gay male *lives acceptable*."[28] That is to say, by including gay men in the category of "human" (to return to the vocabulary of human rights), they become normativized and lose their potential for radically challenging that normativity and the sovereign power that lies behind it. In this way, a politics of lamentation can take a very reactionary form, and grievability itself may be as much a trap as a way to signal social acceptance.

I would push on this point even more to say that if we really think about the corpse qua corpse (and not some representation of the corpse, like the quilt), grievability and acceptability are not—or are not only—what is produced but rather (or also) a wholesale destruction and elimination of the very categories from which such grief and acceptability are generated. To pay more attention to the latter than the former helps us, once again, focus on what the corpse does to and for the living rather than the other way around (wherein lamentation and acceptance become ways to overwrite and silence death, to pull it back into normativity and archism).

The subversive power for Antigone, in my view, comes from the way she allows her brother's dead body to transform her. While *Antigone* continues to be read through lenses of patriarchy and sovereignty (although thanks to the interruptions by Butler and Honig, among others, this form of reading is increasingly under pressure), I also read her as an indication of what it would mean for the living to allow dead bodies to affect them. Rather than serving as the site of projection,

28. Honig, *Antigone, Interrupted*, 62; emphasis original.

Antigone allows Polynices to serve as the site of *counterprojection*, unmaking and undoing the readings and meanings that normally accrue to the living (whether they like it or not). Rather than trying to paper over or eclipse her dead brother's counterprojectional power, Antigone enhances it, directing it to the heart of Theban archism, where it will have the most impact.

The tricky thing here is that while she remains alive, Antigone continues to act in ways that seem recognizable. She mourns, she laments; she is angry and brazen. All these things are explicable as connecting Antigone to the usual registers of social and political life. This is why so many readings of Antigone remain at the level of normalizing her or, if not normalizing, making her rebellion acceptable and understandable according to terms we can all relate to. But if we read Antigone instead as being transformed by her brother's body as a site of the recognizable failure of all those things she would otherwise be determined by, we can read an alternative vocabulary, another way of reading, hearing, and reacting to her brother's death.

This other form of response changes not only the way we think about the play but also the range of options we have to consider when we think about the power and subversiveness of dead bodies (I will return to this subject at much greater length in chapter 4). It is not, therefore, Antigone's proximity to her own death that makes her powerful. While alive, she cannot entirely escape the world of projections of subjectivity, sovereignty, and the like. But in her fierce connection to her dead brother, Polynices, as well as her subversive coconspiracy with her living sister Ismene (as Honig suggests), Antigone finds resources by which to deflect and decenter those projections, allowing her to act in life in ways that are undetermined and unfettered (or *interrupted*, as Honig puts it).

Thus beneath the skein of ordinary action (which includes defiance, desire, lamentation, and all the other things that constitute life), I argue that there is a quieter power afoot in Antigone and the way she reacts to the world. She is not dead herself (until she is), but even as a living body she allows herself to reflect the death of one particular, unique dead and unburied body. She stands in the wake of the distortion and subversion of sovereign projections of authority exerted by Polynices's

corpse and, as such, can herself resist and unmake that power in a way that is rarely afforded to living subjects.

Looking at the two examples of Greek literature in tandem, we can read the *Iliad* as an example of what happens when we *don't* allow ourselves to learn (or unlearn) from the dead, when we don't put ourselves under their quiet, voiceless authority. The characters in that story—Achilles, Patroclus, Hector, Priam, and many others—never escape from the frenzy and desire produced by sovereign projections. The dead bodies in the story become a site of contest—an unwinnable contest, insofar as the living always fail to recognize the way dead bodies are never neutral ground on which they can act out their phantasms of power and authority. Instead, these corpses both unleash and become a set of counterforces, sites that distort and subvert claims to archist power. In such a case, awash in phantasm and projection as they are, we see the failure of archism in its acme of expression—the beautiful death.

We can think of Antigone, on the other hand, as a model for how to submit oneself to the dead, how to hear "what they have to say" (or unsay). In that way, Antigone can discover her own objecthood as opposed to her subjecthood, the latter of which is always in contention with the interpellating powers that call her into being. To all the ways that Antigone is subversive (queering kinship terms, radically exceeding her lamentation, and especially conspiring with her sister and others against the state), I would add one other. If Homer's depictions of the desperate struggles over dead bodies indicate the scope and nature of the state's relationship to the unburied dead, then Antigone shows us how to take that vulnerability and run with it, expanding it into a countervailing power uniquely capable of undermining sovereign and other archist forms of authority. This power of the unburied corpse arises precisely because it is directed at the heart of archist phantasm, the question of life and death itself.

Chapter Three
Early Modern and Modern Renditions of the Unburied Dead

In this chapter, I move from consideration of ancient renditions of unburied bodies to early modern and modern versions. Although I do not see any kind of "progress" in the story of unburied bodies between the classical world and our own time, there are certainly important distinctions and changes that should be noted. Chief among these differences is the advent of biopolitics in modern times. Here, as already noted, the connection between the unburied dead and the state becomes more diffuse and indirect as sovereignty becomes both stronger and ubiquitous, more generally violent and also more disparate. At the same time, while the state may no longer be the immediate agent of violence, it remains a key nexus of both archism and the mythic violence it emits. Even as the form of archist politics shifts, its deepest phantasms of controlling and determining life and avoiding and exporting death to others remain its key features, hence the ongoing centrality of the unburied dead body in the symbolic economy of modern times.

To get a better sense of the more recent understandings of the unburied dead and their relationship to politics, I will look at three examples of literary treatments of unburied bodies and find a variety of relations between bodies, states, and societies as a whole. In Machiavelli's depiction of Cesare Borgia's display of the dead (and riven) corpse of Remirro de Orco, the story focuses on the connection between the state and the body (a connection that diminishes but never ceases; as I will explain further, it continues in our own time with the case of Michael Brown, among many others, as discussed in chapter 4).

At the same time, in Franz Kafka's story "The Hunter Gracchus," the state is not necessarily directly (or even indirectly) involved in the displays and authorities of the unburied dead, even as a distinctly political aspect of such renditions remains visible. Finally, in James Baldwin's "Going to Meet the Man," I look at the lust to desecrate and sunder the body as the effects of a biopolitical sovereignty. Here the body—and in this case in particular, the black body—is shown to be central, rather than peripheral, to the workings of social mechanisms of control and domination in ways that have morphed way past the state and into the practices of the general (white) population.

Cesare Borgia

In terms of modern texts, turning to Machiavelli seems quite logical because he is very much a bridge between the classical and modern worlds. (Despite his general reputation in the English-speaking world as being a refuter of the classical political project, Machiavelli's abiding interests remain classical, particularly in terms of his analysis of ancient Rome.) While, strictly speaking, Machiavelli is not writing "literature" or "fiction," there is something very deliberately fictional about Machiavelli's prose. Machiavelli often seems to be saying two (or more than two) things at once, and the stories he gives us, far from being simply illuminations of points he is trying to make, are often themselves the point, the reason for his writing. This is because for Machiavelli, the power of writing comes via the way it sponsors imitation. Thus in *The Prince* he writes,

> But as to exercise for the mind, the prince ought to read history and study the actions of eminent men, see how they acted in warfare, examine the causes of their victories and defeats in order to imitate the former and avoid the latter, and above all, do as some men have done in the past, who have imitated some one, who has been much praised and glorified, and have always kept his deeds and actions before them, as they say Alexander the Great imitated Achilles, Caesar Alexander and Scipio Cyrus. And whoever reads the life of Cyrus written by Xenophon, will perceive in the life of Scipio how gloriously he imitated the former, and how, in chastity, affability, humanity and liberality Scipio conformed to those qualities of Cyrus as described by Xenophon.[1]

1. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, in *The Prince and the Discourses*, introduction by Max Lerner (New York: Modern Library, 1950), 55. For a superb new reading of Machiavelli

In this way, for Machiavelli, writing not only engages with life and politics but *is*, in some sense, life and politics. The kind of imitation Machiavelli imagines when thinking about Scipio Africanus reading Herodotus is something he would like to transmit to his readers as well. *Imitation* for Machiavelli means something like taking a fiction and making it (pass for) real. It does not matter for Machiavelli that something starts as a lie. In *The Discourses on Livy*, he praises Numa, the second king of Rome, for pretending that a nymph (in the original telling by Livy, it was a goddess) gave him the sacred laws of Rome. Prior to this, he says the Romans were barbaric and lawless, but Numa's lie permitted Rome to become an enduring polity. Those lies, once believed, took on a life of their own, and subsequent generations of Romans were adept at engaging with and reading "reality" in such a way that it helped produce their own agency and success.

In this way, Machiavelli is both an expert on and an enthusiastic promoter of projection and, in particular, the projections that compose and order political life. Accordingly, Machiavelli can be considered the theorist of archism par excellence. Certainly the story of Numa can be read as the way that archism installed itself in Rome. Yet Machiavelli's style is such that even as he appears to promote such practices, he also calls these projections into question.[2] Thus in telling us that Numa lied, Machiavelli is not simply recounting the basis of Roman political authority but also, at the same time, exposing it as a series of frauds and projections, potentially ruining the very thing he appears to be praising.

To give one other telling example, later in the *Discourses*, Machiavelli talks about the Roman consul Papirius, who successfully manipulated the Roman practice of taking auspices before a battle in order to ensure that his soldiers would be successful. The augury was done by scattering grain before a set of sacred chickens; if they pecked at the grain on that particular day, it meant that the battle would be won, and if they did not, it meant

---

and the political consequences of his text see Ronald J. Schmidt, Jr., *Reading Politics with Machiavelli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

2. For an extended discussion of this, see James Martel, *The Misinterpellated Subject* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2017).

the battle would be lost.[3] In this instance, the chickens didn't peck, but the head augur lied and said that they did, knowing Papirius desired a good outcome. When a rumor went around that the chickens had in fact not pecked, Papirius hotly denied it, and to secure the interpretation that he sought, he arranged to have the head augur killed by "friendly fire" from his own troops while in battle. In this way, Papirius got the augury that he desired (the "truth" preserved) and also obtained his victory in battle while limiting the risk of exposure.[4]

Machiavelli follows this with the story of Appius Pulcher, who also found that the chickens did not peck on the eve of battle. Unlike Papirius, Pulcher ruined everything in a very public and impossible-to-ignore fashion. When told the chickens would not eat, he said, "Then let us see whether they will drink," and he had them all thrown into the sea, whereupon the chickens drowned.[5] He then went on to lose the battle.

Formally, Machiavelli is against Pulcher and for Papirius, but the way he tells this story is subversive insofar as Pulcher's actions show the vulnerability of these forms of manipulation and projection and how easily they can be undone. Even though he is actively engaged in dissembling and manipulating facts to ensure that his projection "works," we can see from this perspective that Papirius *needs* the augury to authorize his battles and the larger power and archist authority of Rome. This is not simply a case of lying (in which case there wouldn't be much of a point to all his frantic manipulations to arrive at a settled "truth"). Papirius and the Roman soldiers can't do what they do without the screen of divine authorization—even if it is a screen that has many human fingerprints on it. However much they might engage with it actively and consciously, the belief mechanism it sets up is mandatory and, if ruptured, offers a catastrophic loss of authority in general.

In Machiavelli's telling, we can see that the "truth"—that is, the failure and falseness of these projections—is plainly legible even as the Roman citizens are generally too dazzled by their own power and complicity to realize this. This exposure is critical because the kinds

3. Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, in *The Prince and the Discourses*, introduction by Max Lerner (New York: Modern Library, 1950), 156–57.

4. Ibid., 157.

5. Ibid., 158.

of machinations Machiavelli describes are commonplace in all political systems but are not meant to be noted, amounting once again to what Louis Althusser calls "misrecognition." By carefully explaining the workings of such practices, even if in a celebratory tone, Machiavelli risks giving away the secrets of power to a larger (reading) audience. As such, he might be breaking the spell that such powers have over us by showing us their operations as well as dramatizing the thinness of the reed on which their authority (which otherwise seems absolute and overwhelming) is based. Again, as with the example of Numa, Machiavelli appears to be celebrating archism but might also, at the same time, be exposing its deepest vulnerabilities.

Thinking more specifically about Machiavelli's writings that involve corpses and unburied bodies, one story he tells in *The Prince* involves the actions of Cesare Borgia, a scion of the Borgia family whose father happened to be pope during his lifetime. For Machiavelli, Cesare Borgia is the epitome of everything a prince (or public leader more generally) should be and do to be successful. Borgia is young, audacious, and bold. Although he was born to a rich and powerful family, he did not allow fortune to determine his fate. He ensured that when adversity came—as it must for all of us in Machiavelli's view—he had the ability to resist and shape whatever happened (although in the end, it all came to naught, since he got ill and died).

In chapter 7 of *The Prince*, Machiavelli tells a story about how Borgia sought to create a new state in Italy. To do so, he had to create, from scratch, a basis for authority and legitimacy in a most inhospitable climate. He began his political project in the Romagna, a province "prey to robbery, assaults and every kind of disorder."[6] In this case, Borgia found himself in a situation not unlike that of Numa, although he took a very different tack. In order to pacify and render the rebellious people of that province into citizens, Borgia appointed a henchman, a Spaniard named Remirro de Orco ("a cruel and able man").[7] But although de Orco's wicked deeds did reduce the Romagnans to servility, they were not in and of themselves enough to establish lasting political authority. For Machiavelli, if Borgia had left the people to be dominated by such a

6. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 27.

7. Ibid.

brute as de Orco, he himself would be more akin to another figure: Agathocles, a man so vicious and audacious that he proved highly successful but not deserving, Machiavelli tells us, of glory or worthy of being said to be in possession of virtue.[8] Agathocles didn't bother creating a proper political authority and relied purely on brute strength and terror to keep his population quiescent. For Machiavelli, such a shortsighted and self-serving form of rule would never lead to a lasting state or any form of established political authority. To avoid such a fate and to found (or attempt to, anyway) a truly lasting state (a *res publica* rather than merely a personal fiefdom as Agathocles created), Machiavelli describes what Borgia did next:

> Not deeming such excessive authority expedient [non essere necessario sì eccessiva autorità], lest it should become hateful, [he] appointed a civil court of justice in the center of the province under an excellent president, to which each city appointed its own advocate. And as he knew that the harshness of the past had engendered some amount of hatred, in order to purge the minds of the people and to win them over completely, he resolved to show that if any cruelty had taken place it was not by his orders, but through the harsh disposition of his minister. And having found the opportunity [e, presa sopr'a questo occasione] he had him cut in half and placed one morning in the public square at Cesena with a piece of wood and a blood-stained knife by his side. The ferocity of this spectacle [La ferocità del quale spettaculo] caused the people both satisfaction and amazement [satisfatti e stupidi].[9]

This is a well-known tale, one of Machiavelli's most gleeful descriptions of the way that violence and showmanship can have positive and lasting results. (He similarly celebrates the killing of Remus by Romulus as the founding act of Rome.) The normal way to read this is to say that the display of Remirro de Orca's body accomplished something critical; it announces that the era of violence and subjugation is over and that a new era of mutual respect and public orientation is at hand. It says, in effect, *We have killed violence; now we can have justice instead.*

Indeed, Machiavelli supports this reading by noting that Borgia's handling of de Orco is so masterful that it produces a lasting state,

8. Ibid., 34–35.

9. Ibid., 27, and Machiavelli, *Il Principe, Opere*, in *La Letteratura Italiana: Storia e Testi, Vol. 29*, ed. Raffaele Mattioli (Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1954), 24–25.

which only Borgia's untimely death finally cuts short. Machiavelli writes,

> The valor and ability of the duke [i.e., Borgia] were such [Ed era nel duca tanta ferocità e tanta virtù] and he knew so well how to win over men or vanquish them, and so strong were the foundations that he had laid in this short time, that if he had not had those two armies upon him, or else had been in good health, he would have survived every difficulty. And that his foundations were good is seen from the fact that the Romagna waited for him more than a month; in Rome, although half dead, he remained secure.[10]

Machiavelli concludes this part of the story by saying, "Reviewing thus all the actions of the duke, I find nothing to blame [non saprei reprenderlo], on the contrary, I feel bound, as I have done, to hold him up as an example to be imitated by all who by fortune and with the arms of others have risen to power."[11]

Machiavelli seems to be saying that everything that Borgia did was right and that he does, in fact, demonstrate how to create lasting archist rule. I don't question this reading at all in the sense that it does indeed show a road map for a would-be sovereign to create (i.e., project) political authority. But as I read it, Machiavelli leaves some room (as he often—perhaps always—does) for an alternative reading of this story. For one thing, although it is recounted with great glee, there is no doubt that Borgia's act is gruesomely violent. Recall that "the ferocity of this spectacle caused the people both satisfaction and amazement." Justice and peace are thus inaugurated via an act of extreme and all-too-legible violence. The response of the people is not a full buy-in to whatever is produced but a kind of stupefaction (another, and perhaps more accurate, way that *stupidi* could be translated).

In a sense, then, the very same act that delivers us to projections of a sovereignty that almost survives the death of its founder also announces Borgia's own cruelty, his own failure to be exactly what he is supposed to have become. This legibility resides not so much in Borgia's own body, since as long as he is alive (even partially), he remains a font of rapturous authority, but instead in de Orco's body (which is now two bodies, in a

10. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 29, and *Il Principe*, 26.

11. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 29, and *Il Principe*, 27.

way). His body, cut open and displayed with the knife and the block used, is a mute witness to a message opposite to that which Borgia sought to convey: not *This is justice* but rather *This is what I do to people, even someone who was acting on my orders, when it becomes expedient for me to do so.* The very bloodiness of de Orco's body suggests both the sovereign's magnanimity (because he "killed violence" and established justice) and, at the same time, the irrefutable fact that the origin of the violence he was supposedly ending was not the henchman but the would-be prince himself (hence ensuring that violence was to be a lasting feature of any future republic).

If we read this story this latter way, it ceases to be a narrative about how to establish power through violence and deception, and how to foist this on an unsuspecting population. Instead, it becomes a tale about how sovereign power is always based on violence and deception—a story from which people can learn to resist and subvert that authority, in the same way this reading resists and subverts Machiavelli's own apparent authority and intentions in the text.[12]

There is a paradox here. By rendering this story as part of Machiavelli's discourse, its bloodiness and violence serve as the antidote to the very spectacle it produces both within the story itself (upon the Romagnans) and for the readers (at least potentially). Here violence as such remains visible for all to see. Even if the spectacle itself is what we take away from this telling, the undermining story—inherent in the very same details that create our satisfaction and amazement (or stupefaction)—remains as available and visible to the reader as de Orco's own violated and destroyed body.

That body conveys a very different message than de Orco did while he was alive. Living, de Orco was a killer himself; but as a corpse, his body warns the Romagnans that they are putting themselves into the hands of yet another killer. The key paradox is that the more spectacular the sign of newly created authority, the greater its warning to those who witness that spectacle. Just as in the *Iliad*, where it seemed there was no atrocity great enough to be visited on the bodies of the state's foes (suggesting the state's boundless need to commit

12. In an earlier book, I called this Machiavelli's conspiratorial style. See James Martel, *Textual Conspiracies: Walter Benjamin, Idolatry and Political Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011).

its violence upon bodies), here too there is no spectacle of state violence horrifying enough to fully transcend itself, to make itself the antidote to rather than the epitome of violence. The secret is out, Machiavelli seems to be telling us (and at the very moment that a corresponding political authority is revealed), and the dead body's countermessage can never be denied insofar as that body is the same and only possible site where the authority must be viewed in the first place.

Perhaps more pointedly still, if we think of this story as determining not just a state but archism itself, it becomes less of an accident (a quirk of the telling) and more an absolute necessity that the story of Borgia's attempt to found a nation is illustrated—as well as inaugurated—by a murder. As with the story of the murderous founding of Rome, this act of killing does more than simply demonstrate the state's power; it also establishes the state's authority by exporting death outside of itself. It is as if to say, "Death is there, in two pieces, in Remirro de Orco's dissected corpse. Life is here with me, Borgia. Which do you choose?" Although he remains highly violent, Borgia projects that violence elsewhere, becoming, by this act of deception, "just." At the same time, he also becomes the marker of life (and hence a precursor of the kinds of biopolitics that Foucault discusses and that I will describe further in chapter 4), the only life, he would insist, available to his subjects. For this reason, the Romagnans are faced with an offer that they cannot (or dare not) refuse.

In this way, archism requires this corpse, as well as its public display, in order to show its (fraudulent) authority, the way it can both stave off and bring on death (by withdrawing its protection). The story of de Orco's murder, which initially appears to be simply a "representation" or illustration of state power, is actually its genesis.

The subversive aspect of this results from thinking about how one dead body can bear all the representational weight of archist phantasm. If we think of de Orco as the first "citizen" of Borgia's new state (in that his corpse is what inaugurates that citizenry), we see what a problematical model he is for the rest of the citizenry. If his body is read as intended, then all is well and the phantasms of archism can continue uninterrupted. If, however, that body is not read correctly—a risk Machiavelli often toys with in his gleeful revelations about the

gory origins of political forms of rule—that very edifice of archist authority itself could vanish in an instant. Furthermore, given that the corpse is an unreliable basis for archist phantasm (even the corpse of a person who was as reliably archist as de Orco was while he was alive), we can see that this first citizen is also, in effect, the state's first revolutionary.

For Machiavelli, all states have murdered bodies at their centers, and these dead bodies remain a permanent threat to the authority they are employed to create. The state can never get rid of this threat precisely because the corpse embodies—quite literally—the founding moment (one that states must periodically return to by reproducing that original act of violence). It is also a resource for resistance that the state's subjects may always draw upon—that is, if they allow themselves to see what the dead body is doing even as it serves as the phantasmic basis of their oppression.

The Hunter Gracchus

If Machiavelli appears to tell the story of sovereign power and authority even as he may be undermining it, we get no such confusion with Franz Kafka—a famously complicated thinker and writer much beloved by Benjamin, among others, and with distinctly anarchist tendencies. Kafka's work is much more openly subversive to the delusions of power and authority of states and other archist institutions. Many macabre and gruesome elements appear in Kafka's work, but they function in ways that, in my view, render Kafka as one of the most sublimely subversive of thinkers. In this way, Kafka is a critical voice in thinking about the unburied dead body's power and effects.

In his short story "The Hunter Gracchus," Kafka describes a hunter who, dying while hunting, finds that something goes wrong; rather than ascending to heaven as he is supposed to, he remains earthbound, albeit very much dead. In this surreal story, the ship that was meant to take him to heaven gets stuck and endlessly tours the world with this unburied dead body as its chief passenger.

Although dead, the hunter Gracchus can talk and reflect on his condition with his interlocutor, Salvatore, the "Burgomaster" (or mayor) of Riva, the town Gracchus visits in the story. As is typical for Kafka,

his story has no resolution; the hunter is condemned to endlessly repeating his cycle of death and visitations. Yet Gracchus does not seem to despair about his status. When the Burgomaster asks him, "Are you dead?" the hunter replies,

> "Yes . . . as you see. Many years ago, yes, it must be a great many years ago, I fell from a precipice in the Black Forest—that is in Germany—when I was hunting a chamois. Since then I have been dead."
>
> "But you are alive too," said the Burgomaster.
>
> . . . "In a certain sense I am alive too. My death ship lost its way: a wrong turn of the wheel, a moment's absence of mind on the pilot's part, a longing to turn aside towards my lovely native country, I cannot tell what it was; I only know this, that I remained on earth and that ever since my ship has sailed earthly waters. So I, who asked for nothing better than to live among my mountains, travel after my death through all the lands of the earth."[13]

In the hands of an author like Kafka, a story about the fate of the dead—at least this particular dead person—becomes as much a commentary on the desires and powers of the living as anything about life after death or the plight of the unburied dead.

Although the hunter's coming and going seem both arbitrary and purely mythological, at the same time, there is something distinctly political about the hunter's sojourning. He travels in style; when he arrives in Riva, his bier is borne by two men "in dark coats with silver buttons," and the hunter lies beneath "a great flower-patterned tasseled silk cloth."[14] When his bier is set down, his assistants surround it with long, flickering candles as if he was a person of great importance. Furthermore, he is greeted not by just anyone but by the highest local official, the Burgomaster himself, who has been told by a dove that he must "receive [Gracchus] in the name of the city."[15] The pomp and seriousness of the hunter's conveyance, which takes up fully half the text of this short story, suggests a head of state, but not in the ordinary sense. Rather, he seems to be an emissary from a world that lies right at the edge of human experience.

13. Franz Kafka, "The Hunter Gracchus" ("Der Jäger Gracchus"), in *Parables and Paradoxes: Bilingual Edition* (ed. Nahum N. Glazer, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir; New York: Schocken, 1961), 129.

14. Ibid., 123.

15. Ibid., 129.

Yet for all this pomp, the hunter announces that people generally avoid him as best they can. He tells the Burgomaster,

> Nobody will read what I say here, no one will come to help me; even if all the people were commanded to help me, every door and window would remain shut, everybody would take to bed and draw the bedclothes over his head, the whole earth would become an inn for the night. And there is sense in that, for nobody knows of me, and if anyone knew he would not know where I could be found, and if he knew where I could be found, he would not know how to deal with me, he would not know how to help me. The thought of helping me is an illness that has to be cured by taking to one's bed.[16]

Whatever it is he represents, the hunter clearly unsettles the living and is himself unsettled. He admits to lapses when he is confused and shouts out (as he does when the Burgomaster first greets him). But then he states, "To drive out such thoughts I need only look round me and verify where I am and—I can safely assert—have been for hundreds of years."[17]

This mixture of anxiety and certainty, of being both in and out of place (*ataphoi*), is reinforced by the fact that despite his claim that all shun him, he speaks easily with the Burgomaster and there is no sign on either side that this is an extraordinary moment. The kind of liminal state that the hunter occupies is therefore both very familiar and very threatening, both essential to the fabric of reality (he has been there "for hundreds of years") and a challenge to all it represents.

In this way, the hunter signifies both the power and limitations of the unburied dead body. His endless journeying is not his fault. He says that originally, "everything happened in good order. I pursued, I fell, bled to death in a ravine, died, and this ship should have conveyed me to the next world. I can still remember how gladly I stretched myself out on this pallet for the first time."[18] He therefore shows himself to be a willing participant in the normalizing architecture of death; the fact that things went awry is not due to anything he did, and he is no more in control of his situation than anyone else.

16. Ibid., 133–35.

17. Ibid., 135.

18. Ibid., 133.

Tantalizingly, a "normal" death, the process that completes and delineates life, seems just out of reach for the hunter. A bit earlier, he tells the Burgomaster, "I am always in motion. But when I make a supreme flight and see the gate actually shining before me, I awaken presently on my old ship, still standing forlornly in some earthly sea or other. The fundamental error of my onetime death grins at me as I lie in my cabin."[19] In this way, the hunter can see the phantasms of the afterlife we all strive for, the completion and perfection of life via death; but in embodying the failure and nonappearance of those phantasms, he stands for what the dead body is when it is not caught up in such projections. His body goes everywhere and nowhere at the same time. It moves endlessly, but in a style of repetition and nondeliverance, thus expertly delineating the border between the transcendent (phantasmic) and the material world.

In writing this parable, Kafka gives us a way to understand the dead body more clearly as a site of failure and nontranscendence. He persists in a state of being that causes dread on the one hand (everyone seems to avoid him if they can), but when one does engage with him, as the Burgomaster does, his terrifying appearance is replaced by something more familiar and comforting. In the very way that the dead body is uncanny—both very familiar and very alien at the same time—the hunter offers us a glimpse, but no more than that, of an alternative way of thinking about the dead body's movement, its *agency*. Unburied, the body—this particular body, anyway—terrifies and comforts in equal measures. It terrifies because it suggests that beliefs about where the body goes and what it signifies might not actually pan out (and if the operations of death don't function as they should one time, perhaps they never do at all). It comforts because when we "traverse the fantasy," as Lacan would put it, we see nothing dramatic—just an iteration of the living body, only now dead (but not so dead as to be unable to communicate the peculiar complications of its position to the living).

In this short parable, therefore, the dead *do* talk—not as ghosts, but as dead bodies. And what they have to say is disappointingly ordinary; they don't know much more than we do about their situation, their actions and arrivals. Indeed, it is not so much what the hunter Gracchus

19. Ibid., 131.

has to say as what he *doesn't* that is critical for thinking about how the dead can affect the living. For him, the promise of heaven and perfection is as chimerical as it is for us; he has nothing to tell us on that score. In this way, even a talking dead body does not know, and cannot guarantee, the truth of the phantasms that undergird our political and social lives. Because we *do* expect the dead to know these things, when we find out how little Gracchus knows, it radically calls those phantasms into question (if the hunter doesn't know the answer to these questions, who possibly would?). What we get from him is not truth but just a body, just his own all-too-limited experience.

At the same time, what the Gracchus does say is important too, albeit mainly in a negative and subversive sense. The hunter Gracchus, in his speeches, his comportment, and his uncanniness, dispels the majesty and inevitability of a certain understanding of death, one that conforms with normative and archist pronouncements about the boundaries and rules of the kingdom of the living. He does not behave as we might expect an emissary from this boundary region to behave. Although he has a certain grandeur about him, his puzzlement about his own situation, his casual way of talking (one of Kafka's specialties), and even his all-too-human—and living—response to his condition (e.g., waking up shrieking) all serve to subvert and complicate the certainties we normally attribute to the dead. Even as he speaks and acts, the hunter Gracchus also in effect "unspeaks" and "unacts" (more on that in the conclusion), disappointing and subverting the promises and beliefs that otherwise form—and indeed frame—what passes for reality in our world in a way only a dead body could.

Accordingly, given his liminal status, the hunter Gracchus is a creature of the aleatory, of what remains unscripted in the face of all our projections and the revelation of those projections as failures. At the story's end, the Burgomaster asks the hunter,

> "And now do you think of staying here in Riva with us?"
>
> "I think not," said the hunter with a smile, and, to excuse himself, he laid his hand on the Burgomasters' knee. "I am here, more than that I do not know, further than that I cannot go. My ship has no rudder, and it is driven only by the wind that blows in the undermost regions of death."[20]

20. Ibid., 135.

Here the hunter tells the Burgomaster (not unkindly, as we see) that his presence is not quite his to control: "I am here, more than that I do not know, further than that I cannot go." I suggest that in these statements, the hunter demonstrates a version of Nietzsche's *amor fati*, an acceptance and peace with his own indetermination and ever-changing nature. That it took his death to discover this (clearly up until then he was a true believer in all the phantasms that normally dominate our lives) is suggested by the fact that the winds that blow him here are from "the undermost regions of death." In this way, death itself serves to subvert the projections human beings make upon life. When things go as they are supposed to, the dead body is buried, cremated, or otherwise disposed of, and we see no sign of this resistance. But in the case of the hunter Gracchus, his resistance to such conventions becomes legible in a way that cannot be missed—or at least in a way that becomes much more difficult to ignore.

Finally, what is perhaps most interesting about this story—certainly from a political perspective—is that this unburied body is not a victim of the state or prince; it is not an emblem of the power and viciousness of sovereignty or a form of violence meant, like Borgia's, to announce the end of violence (paradoxically by committing a very violent act) and the presence of "justice" and sovereign authority. In the absence of that founding violence, we have an opportunity with the hunter Gracchus to see the unburied body in a less charged and fraught setting. For this reason, the story can be seen as especially subversive to the workings of archist forms of authority precisely because it does not have the confusion of a sovereign assertion of authority that eclipses or masks every other voice or presence. The hunter upsets and complicates in part because he does not have to compete with active projections of sovereign authority. Purely exterior to the world of sovereign power (even as he seems to somewhat mimic its grandiosity and pomp), he shows the way that at the heart of phantasms of sovereignty, life, and various forms of meaning, there is no "answer," just an endless wanderer who, unburied, will never complete (and thus resolve) his journey. Unsettling rather than answering questions about his life and purpose, all we get is the failure, the nonresponse. As quiet and mundane as he seems, the hunter Gracchus poses a dire threat to the archist reading of

the world and its promise to understand, conquer, and stave off death. He shows that what we seek in archist phantasm does not exist, not even in the "life" that continues after death, and that is perhaps the most subversive thing he could possibly say (or not say) or do.

Insofar as he can speak and is therefore not "fully" dead, Gracchus is perhaps not as innocent of projection as a truly dead body (i.e., one that doesn't move and speak) might be. But even if his state may not reflect pure nonprojection—it is, after all, the product of the imagination of a writer, Kafka, who was very much alive as he wrote it—whatever is projected and imputed to the hunter cannot support the usual projections of authority and power. Kafka does not, and cannot, know what it is like to actually be dead. None of us can do that while we are alive. But he is very aware of what it is like to be alive, to be the subject of phantasms of the authority of the law and the state; and as such he can readily imagine how a particular unburied body—the hunter Gracchus himself—can unmake and subvert those things by dint of his very (non)existence.

Kafka's position vis-à-vis the dead is thus not to assume that he knows what the dead know (in the story, we see that the dead—at least this dead hunter—know nothing) but once again only to put himself in the stream of their negating effects. Giving voice to this effect through this character, Kafka models—not unlike Antigone—what it means and what it looks like when the living allow the dead to affect them rather than the (usual) other way around.

Going to Meet the Man

The third and final narrative I will consider is James Baldwin's short story "Going to Meet the Man." In turning to this story, I am transitioning from a general consideration of the unburied dead to a more particular and pointed case: the unburied body of color, which is also the subject of chapter 4. In thinking about the treatment and display of dead bodies of color (and in this story, in particular, the bodies of murdered African Americans), we come closer to the "belly of the beast"—the racist heart of sovereign power and authority and the violence and contempt it displays for those it deems to be outside of its protected and favored categories (and hence another version,

albeit internal to a state's boundaries, of what Arendt is describing when she talks about the condition of the stateless in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*).

"Going to Meet the Man" is part of a volume of Baldwin's short stories by the same name. First published in 1965, it portrays both sexual and physical violence against black people as narrated from the point of view of a racist white man named Jesse, a sheriff in a Southern town during the civil rights era. As the story opens, Jesse is portrayed in bed beside his white wife, Grace. He wants to have sex with her but finds himself impotent. Deeply frustrated, Jesse blames the stress of his job as a sheriff, which involves a lot of intimate contact with black people, whom he finds repellent. Even so, Jesse's repulsion for black people is mixed with something else—the deep longing and pleasure he feels through his torture, domination, and rape of black bodies. As he moves closer to his wife's body, Jesse wishes to "be buried in her like a child" and never again "feel that filthy, kinky, greasy hair under his hand, never again watch those black breasts leap against the leaping cattle prod, never hear those moans again or watch that blood run down or the fat lips split or the sealed eyes struggle open."[21]

The mixture of racism, sexuality, and violence depicted here only grows more explicit as the story continues. Even before this moment, Jesse reflects on how black bodies—and more specifically, black women's bodies—are an integral part of his sexual life. Musing on his impotence, he states, "Nothing had ever bothered him before, certainly not getting it up. Sometimes, sure, like any other man, he knew that he wanted a little more spice than Grace could give him and he would drive over yonder and pick up a black piece or arrest her, it came to the same thing."[22] But something has changed this dynamic of sexuality and violence. Set as it is in the civil rights era, "Going to Meet the Man" reflects the moment when the perception that black people were endlessly going to accept their horrific treatment at the hands of racist whites was coming to an end. (As I'll show, this is only a perception

21. James Baldwin, "Going to Meet the Man," in *Going to Meet the Man* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 230–31. For another, much earlier book that graphically depicts lynching—and that was very popular at the time among African American readers—see Sutton E. Griggs, *The Hindered Hand* (New York: Perfect Library, 1905).

22. Baldwin, "Going to Meet the Man," 230.

the whites have; black people were resisting all along, but something has definitely changed nonetheless in terms of the nature and form of that resistance.)

As sheriff, Jesse presides over a jail filled with black people singing protest songs reframed from old spirituals. These songs, the resistance that they manifest, and Jesse's own failure to stop them are intimately linked in Jesse's mind with his impotence. The new challenge to white power and authority threatens to upend not just Jesse's libido but his status as a ruler, rapist, and oppressor of the local black community—that is, it threatens his identity at its very core.

In Jesse's futile attempt to stop the singing in the jails, he beats one young black man nearly (or perhaps completely) to death, demanding that he stop the others from singing. Although he seems resolutely heterosexual, Jesse's excitement in response to this and other violent incidents shows the link between sex and violence is not limited to Jesse's relations with black women. Even telling his wife later that night about how he beat up the young man (partially) excites him. Baldwin writes, "As he talked [to his wife] he began to hurt all over with that peculiar excitement which refused to be released."[23]

"Going to Meet the Man" is structured like a journey into the darkest reaches of Jesse's persona. This excitement "that refused to be released" is a kind of mystery whose solution Jesse moves closer toward as he thinks and talks to his wife. His intense feelings about the young man he was beating are tied to Jesse's realization that he knew him from an earlier time. At that time, the young black man was a boy, and Jesse was coming by to see the boy's grandmother, a customer of his in the days he had worked for a mail-order company. Coming up to the boy who is sitting outside of his grandmother's house, Jesse offers him some chewing gum—something he did when he saw his relationship with black people as friendly (insofar as no one seemed to be causing him any trouble). The boy responds to his offer by saying, "I don't want nothing you got, white man," and he goes back into his house.[24] Later, as Jesse stands over the same young man in the jail cell, the latter repeats his defiance, this time attesting that the singing will not stop. He tells Jesse, "Those kids ain't

23. Ibid., 232.

24. Ibid., 235.

going to stop singing. We going to keep on singing until every one of you miserable white mothers go stark raving out of your minds."[25]

These moments of defiance—the earlier one a harbinger of increased resistance and then Jesse's subsequent reencounter with the young man—unleash something in Jesse. Back in the jail cell:

> Jesse wanted to go over to him and pick [the young man] up and pistol whip him until the boy's head burst open like a melon. He began to tremble with what he believed was rage, sweat, both cold and hot, raced down his body, the singing filled him as though it were a weird uncontrollable, monstrous howling rumbling up from the depths of his own belly, he felt an icy fear rise in him and raise him up, and he shouted, he howled.[26]

In bed with his wife, as he recalls that memory (and the memory within the memory), Jesse's anger and confusion continue to fester. He thinks about God, duty, and earlier generations of whites who didn't have to face the overt threat of black refusal that he does.

The short story approaches its resolution with a phrase from a song that comes unbidden into his head: "I stepped in the river at Jordan."[27] Baldwin writes, "[Jesse] began to sweat. He felt an overwhelming fear, which yet contained a curious and dreadful pleasure."[28] Instantly, Jesse is transported to a much earlier memory, of a time from his own boyhood when he and his parents had gone to see the lynching of a black man. At the time, Jesse didn't fully understand what was going on. The excitement and anticipation of the lynching had a major effect on Jesse's parents as well as all the white townspeople. On their way to the lynching, Jesse asks if they are going to a picnic, and his father says, "That's right . . . we're going on a picnic. You won't ever forget *this* picnic—!"[29]

The lynching they attend is for a black man accused of hurting—possibly killing—an old white woman. As Jesse and his family approach the site of the soon-to-be murder, he sees a stream of cars full of white

25. Ibid., 233.

26. Ibid., 235.

27. Ibid., 239.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., 243.

people heading for the event, and there is a festival feeling of excitement and camaraderie among the white people gathered.

Approaching the scene of the lynching, Jesse is hoisted on his father's shoulders so he can see what is going on. A naked black man is chained up by his hands from a tree limb, his head hanging down, his face and body caked in sweat and blood. The man is being raised and lowered onto an open fire. As he is watching this, "[Jesse] began to feel a joy that he had never felt before. He watched the hanging gleaming body, the most beautiful and terrible object that he had ever seen till then."[30]

At that point, one of his father's friends approaches the dying man with a long knife. Baldwin writes that "Jesse wished that he had been that man."[31] What follows is certainly the story's pinnacle. The white man with the knife takes the black man's genitals in his hand. They seemed "as remote as meat being weighted in the scales; but heavier too, much heavier . . . [The] white man stretched them, cradled them, caressed them."[32] Then, as Jesse screamed along with the crowd, "the knife flashed, first up, then down, cutting the dreadful thing away, and the blood came roaring down."[33] Finally, "the crowd rushed forward, tearing at the body with their hands, with knives, with rocks, with stones, howling and cursing."[34] Jesse feels as though he has been let in on a big secret. The black man's body is then put on display, "merely . . . a black charred object on the black charred ground."

> "They going to leave him here, then?" Jesse whispered.
> "Yeah," said his father, "they'll come and get him by and by."[35]

With this memory, the grown-up Jesse, now fully aroused, grabs his wife, saying, "Come on, sugar, I'm going to do you like a nigger, just like a nigger, come on sugar, and love me just like you'd love a nigger," suggesting that Grace will be the recipient of some of the sexual

30. Ibid., 247.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid., 247–48.

33. Ibid., 248.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid., 249.

violence he has channeled through his thoughts and memories of his encounters with black people.[36]

Jesse's sexual arousal comes from his direct memory of how he was let in on the "secret," as he puts it. The lynching is a radically transformative moment for him. When he was younger, he had a black friend, a boy named Otis, someone he looked up to and asked for advice, but it becomes clear that his friendship with Otis will not survive this revelation of white power. By participating in the lynching, even if initially unwittingly, Jesse is brought into the racist white community; he makes a clean break with thinking of blacks either as his equals or even as being from the same species. His entry ticket into white power and supremacy (but also his reward for that membership) is the joy he takes in the sight of the violent desecration of a black person. Later, we understand, he too will vent his rage at black people, just as the white adults of his community collectively tore the black lynched man limb from limb.

To bring this discussion back in line with the larger themes of this book, "Going to Meet the Man" demonstrates quite viscerally the way a body of color—in this case, specifically a black body—can be the basis for the production of an entire political and social reality. Here we are talking not about state power but about something more dispersed, a kind of social contract committed to murdering black people and destroying black bodies that, for all its decentralization, perfectly conforms to archist forms of rule. With the spread of democratic forms of politics, functions that were once exclusively the state's purview have now diffused to the general (but still privileged) white population, more in line with the formulations Foucault calls biopolitics (to be discussed further in the next chapter). In the story, the white community takes on the role of governmentality; it tries and executes a perceived enemy, seemingly without any recourse to the formalities of law (although Jesse's own subsequent career as a racist sheriff shows how the distinctions between legal and extralegal authority are very thin under conditions of biopolitics).

Baldwin shows very clearly how acts of lynching, the public display and participation in murder, has bonded the white community together.

36. Ibid.

The white people at the lynching readily and happily offer each other food and other material comforts. Yet their shared joy and bond do not come from one another; they require the intermediary of a violated black body.

Indeed, Baldwin demonstrates how rapidly that community dissolves when concentrated black resistance removes or endangers the possibility of a supine black body. Jesse thinks about the change in his relationship to other, mostly older white racist men since the dawn of the civil rights movement:

> Men much older than he, who had been responsible for law and order much longer than he, were now much quieter than they had been, and the tone of their jokes, in a way that he could not quite put his finger on, had changed. These men were his models . . . they had taught him what it meant to be a man. He looked to them for courage now. It wasn't that he didn't know that what he was doing was right—he knew that, nobody had to tell him that; it was only that he missed the ease of former years.[37]

Without their shared ability to torture, rape, and murder black people with imagined impunity, the basis of their friendship and sense of camaraderie collapses: "They didn't have much time to hang out with each other these days. The white men who dominate this community tended to stay close to their families every free minute because nobody knew what might happen next."[38] In this new period, mixing uncertainty with the ongoing desire for white supremacy, each white man goes into his own corner, isolated with his family.

Members of the white community are afraid to talk to one another about what is going on precisely because it is so threatening to their core identity. Baldwin demonstrates this quite clearly when he writes, "[The whites] rarely mentioned it, but they *knew* that some of the niggers had guns."[39] In this way, Jesse's fear of the jailed black people's singing can be read as a stand-in for a more pointed form of resistance, a fear that the white community might themselves be at the receiving end of some of the violence they have been meting out for centuries.

37. Ibid., 236–37.

38. Ibid., 237.

39. Ibid.

We see here more evidence for something I mentioned very early in this book: the state—or in this case, the entire apparatus of white governmentality—needs its subjects in a way those same subjects do not need the state/white community. The white community in this story needs its black subjects to obey, or at least to be unable to prevent themselves from being raped and murdered. The whites need black people to be displayed as dead bodies in order to cement and seal their subjection, a demonstrated and active lack of resistance. That lack has to be made evident and present to the white supremacists in the most visceral and tangible ways possible in order to sustain their own community and its identity. And it can't just happen once; it must be performed and repeated over and over to sustain the community it has helped forge (in the same way that Machiavelli claims that founding acts of violence must periodically be repeated to restore a republic to its original source of authority).

The black people, on the other hand, don't need the state or the white community at all. It is a scourge on them and nothing more. Their growing resistance—evident in the young black man's words to Jesse, "I don't want nothing you got, white man"—comes out of that realization. This is a call for separation, a move away from the white gaze and from the hope for universal citizenship and liberal forms of identity the white community perpetually dangle before black and brown people (not unlike the gum Jesse offers the young man). "I don't want nothing you got" signals a full-on refusal, a radical break both from the white community and from the impossible and lethal role for black people that it presupposes (reminiscent once again of the general vs. the political strike).

The shift Baldwin describes here from a perception of black passiveness during Jim Crow to defiance during the civil rights era may be exaggerated for dramatic effect; his story clearly shows that it is not the case that there was no resistance in the earlier time and total resistance in the story's present. Recall that the very thing that summons Jesse's memory of attending a lynching is a line from a song ("I stepped in the river at Jordan"). Prior to the capture and lynching of the black man, the entire black community sang that song in the hopes that he might get away. The links between this moment of singing

and protest and the protest songs in the jail in the story's present are clear.

The fact that singing should serve as a basis of resistance both at the height of Jim Crow and during the civil rights era is instructive. The black community's singing serves as an alternative form of both meaning making and collective forms of interpretation, a sign that the white community does not control the power of signification itself. Insofar as the black bodies being tortured and destroyed require an intense and very specific form of interpretation (i.e., they must be read as demonstrating unquestioned acquiescence to white authority), any competitor to that kind of signifying agency is very powerful and very dangerous to racist white rule.

Indeed, the whites in the story recognize this. Even back in the full heart of Jim Crow, Jesse's father says of the black people singing, "'I guess they singing for him [i.e., the man who is about to be lynched,]' his father said, seeming very weary and subdued now. 'Even when they're sad, they sound like they just about to go and tear off a piece.'"[40] This threat is part of the excitement; the possibility of danger and the eradication of that danger seem to be an integral part of the perceived power the white community receives through their public acts of violence against black bodies (although there, too, that lack of resistance is more a matter of white perception than reality). It seems a perfectly passive black body would not do the trick. White supremacy can only flourish when its actors recognize black agency and overcome it. This provides further evidence that there is no such thing as a pure moment of perfect power; there is only a threat that may or may not be overcome. The art of building up a white supremacist community, in this case, comes from their ability to convince themselves that *despite the danger*, they will always prevail (a tacit recognition of the reality of black subjectivity even as it is simultaneously being erased and overcome). In the case of Jesse's father, he, much as his son will, tries to appropriate this complicated entanglement of threat and power for himself. Alluding to his own imminent chance to engage in one-sided violence (but also, it seems, perhaps to sexually dominate his wife), after remarking about the implied threat that the black community is expressing

40. Ibid., 239.

through their singing, the father "started whistling. 'You see? [he says,] When I begin to feel it, I get kind of musical too.'"[41]

This kind of bravado is harder to muster in Jesse's time. Indeed, he needs to resort to an original memory, the moment of his own inculcation into white supremacy, banking on the fact that, being in the past, the threat in question was "successfully" overcome and is hence available to perform its necessary offices in the present. He needs that sureness in order to summon the sense of his own power and invulnerability, but of course, that sureness was not true even then and certainly is not true any longer.

What has changed in the civil rights era is not the presence or absence of black resistance but rather that that resistance has come out into the open, becoming more visible, more undeniable; this new visibility competes with and even overcomes the manifest lack of resistance displayed in public lynchings or other open acts of violence against black bodies.

This is an example of how delicate is the tissue of white supremacist community; they require something that has never been true (lack of resistance by black people) to be made evident, acted out in and upon specific black bodies that in turn receive a kind of ultraviolence. In the *Iliad*, the need to desecrate an enemy surpassed its possibility of expression, but here an added frenzy, both violent and sexual (and sexually violent), is included, a sign not of white power but of white impotence, its inability to hurt that body enough to make its own power and identity real, secured, and rendered fully ontological once and for all (and hence no longer requiring a black body to rape and murder as its own basis for existence).

Achieving Immortality

In Baldwin's story, the lynched black man's body, seemingly a site of pure subjectification (perhaps *objectification* is a better word), is actually a site of intense—and uncertain—struggle. As demonstrated, insofar as the white supremacists need this site to speak of their utter power over black bodies, they display their vulnerability in that need. And Baldwin has rendered that vulnerability impossible to miss. By opting to narrate this story through the perspective of a white racist,

41. Ibid., 240.

Baldwin offers a "behind-the-scenes look" that displays not absolute white power and authority but its opposite.

Because of this particular narrative perspective, we are also privy to many emotions and states of mind we might not otherwise be aware of. One of these insights comes from what might be called, for lack of a better word, the "positive" aspects of white supremacy. As we have seen, when young Jesse witnesses the torture and castration of the black man being lynched, he feels intense joy—this is the emotion that he has been trying to access throughout the narrative, one that only comes to him by remembering scenes of violence against black bodies.

Usually when there is an attempt to imagine the subject position of a white racist, the emotional state being imagined is one of fear and hatred. What does it mean that Jesse experiences his entry into white supremacy as joy? As I read this, it suggests to me that Baldwin is recognizing that a community cannot be created and sustained through fear and hate alone. There has to be a "positive" aspect to belonging to the community of white supremacists, and this joy—an emotion completely and only connected to the violent domination of black bodies—is the key to a sustained white identity in this story.

But what is this joy about? If it is merely joy at seeing a black person being tortured and killed, this is not that different from hate (or fear); it would just be a sadistic pleasure in seeing someone else brought low. This is no doubt part of what is felt, but it does not explain the kind of coherence and longevity that Baldwin tracks along the history his story covers. In what way can this joy be considered as a positive emotion, one that could sustain and nourish the racist community for generations?

I think the answer might come from thinking more deeply about the status of whiteness and blackness as they are created through the lynching Baldwin describes. Normally, it is thought that white supremacists seek to take away the humanity of black people and others through their acts of violence, but I believe Baldwin is showing us something different. Rather than making black people subhuman, this story shows that lynching and sexual violence render them all too human. The act

of murdering black people and desecrating their bodies demonstrates, above all, how deeply human, mortal, and fleshy black people are.

By evincing this power over others, white supremacists therefore performatively enact, or even produce, their own superhuman status. The violence they visit on black bodies transforms, as it were, their own bodies too, making them something other than they are. At the height of the lynching scene, Jesse looks over at his mother and thinks that "she was more beautiful than he had ever seen her, and more strange."[42] If the black man's body in the story is a site to demonstrate his mortality (by castrating and killing him), that suggests that the white supremacists have effectively transcended death and are (therefore) immortal—and beautiful—in a way that accords with what I suggested in Machiavelli's reading of Borgia. Here we get to the heart of archism, also noted in the earlier discussion of the beautiful death in the *Iliad*. We see the symbolic transfer of death away from one group (in this case, whites) and toward another (in this case, blacks). This, I think, is the true source of the joy that Jesse feels both at the moment of the lynching and then years later as a buried memory, a hope and dream that he may yet have transcended his own fleshiness and mortality.[43]

The contrast between the black man's all-too-tangible body and the almost bodiless and joyful transcendence experienced by the white community at the lynching (the "secret" that Jesse has been let in on) shows that through these acts of violence, the white supremacists hope to access the ultimate promise of archist subjectivity: the idea that they can transcend and overcome their own limitations, their own deaths, and be full universal subjects (the path to which comes only from rendering some other *not* universal—just a man, in this case, with a very particular and tangible body they can carve up as they please).

This, I think, is the true payoff of Baldwin's choice to narrate his story from the position of a white supremacist. Once again, if white supremacy were purely based on fear and hatred, it could not

42. Ibid., 247.

43. Many of the insights I have about "Going to Meet the Man" come from conversations with students in my Politics and Literature class in the fall of 2017 at San Francisco State University. Many students took part in these discussions, but I would particularly like to single out and thank Marcelle French.

be sustained from generation after generation as it has been; it would collapse of its own negativity. Baldwin discovers that the "positive" side of white supremacy, its bid for and promise of immortality, is based on ensuring that each black person they kill and display is *only* a body (a "bare life").

In Nietzschean terms, you could say that the white supremacists believe that they have escaped being "who they are"; they believe they have pulled off the ultimate divorce from themselves, from their hatred of their own fleshy selves and even the terror of death itself, fully and finally redeeming themselves from the curse of being oneself.

The white supremacists then do the opposite of what I have been arguing for in this book; rather than let the dead affect them, learning from the dead or seeking out their authority, they seek to avoid death altogether by outsourcing it onto other bodies that have been tangibly marked as "other" based on racial distinctions. Accordingly, they epitomize, or even produce, archism; they double down on pure projection and phantasm, choosing this route as a way to avoid the awful reality of their own vulnerability and their own imminent deaths, thereby achieving what Ta-Nehisi Coates calls the "Dream" of being white.[44]

Believing in Death

In his well-known essay "The Fire Next Time," Baldwin makes the link among race, death, and archism—which I see as the implicit point of "Going to Meet the Man"—explicitly clear. He writes,

> Perhaps the whole root of our trouble, the human trouble, is that we will sacrifice all the beauty of our lives, will imprison ourselves in totems, taboos, crosses, blood sacrifices, steeples, mosques, races, armies, flags, nations in order to deny the fact of death, which is the only fact we have. It seems to me that one ought to rejoice in the *fact* of death—ought to decide, indeed, to earn one's death by confronting with passion the conundrum of life. One is responsible to life: it is the small beacon in that terrifying darkness from which we come and to which we must return. One must negotiate this passage as nobly as possible, for the sake of those who are coming after us.

44. Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2015), 151.

> But white Americans do not believe in death, and this is why the darkness of my skin so intimidates them.[45]

This provides a very clear explanation for why death cannot be read out of life and furthermore why the attempt to do so is the basis of "races, armies, flags, nations," and so much more of the architecture of archism. In the face of so much phantasm and projection, "death . . . is the only fact we have," the one element of life that cannot be read out of the picture, cannot be overcome regardless of how much archism struggles and promises to be done with it. For Baldwin, to earn one's death, to live a life in the face of this one singular fact, is something all human beings should strive for. Yet Baldwin tells us that white Americans "do not believe in death" and are therefore committed to this phantasm of life without death (much as the Athenians were, albeit in a much different form). Understanding this, we can better see how vulnerable, how delicate, the hold of white supremacy has on its adherents. Death is revealed to be the one ontological anchor (although Arendt would add one more: the fact of birth or natality), the one reliable font of resistance to mythic violence, precisely because no amount of phantasm or violence can stop human beings from dying. This does not mean that death is "authentic" or real in some absolute and knowable way (although Baldwin seems to indicate that it could be that too) but rather that it represents an interruption in the fabric of phantasm, a limit that for all of the attempts to override it (through the idea of a "beautiful death," through the promise of liberal universalism, and through racism and biopolitics) remains a gap in the symbolic order that refuses to disappear. Thus the resistance we see in figures like Antigone comes simply from putting herself in the path of the negating effects of death, of the violence that it does to violence, its antiprojective power.

By recognizing death's unique status, Baldwin shows how toxic doubt can be for archist phantasms; because the white community's belief in its own superiority is based on a denial of the bodies that they (also) have, it means that any sense of equivalency—any sense that black people are not wholly subservient, that they are

45. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 91–92; emphasis original.

not merely sites upon which white power can be visited (even as it requires *some* form of black resistance after all)—is deeply subversive to the core of white identity. Insofar as, for all their gyrations to the contrary, the whites in "Going to Meet the Man" (and Jesse most legibly of all) remain all too fleshy and human, white supremacists remain haunted by death (whether they "believe" in it or not). They can try to export death onto others, but in the end, they too will die. Even as they view their murder of a black man as the reduction of the other to a mere human, they also see evidence of their own death, their own fleshiness and humanity—no amount of racism can erase that basic fact. The delicate balance required to ignore or suppress this fact is readily undone if a full and severe racism is not ceaselessly practiced and if the black bodies upon which their archism is enacted and produced are not rendered legible as passive, broken, and (finally) fully and only dead (or doomed to die). Any challenge, any lingering sense of resistance or doubt, any dead body that is not purely passive therefore wreaks havoc with a system that requires death and passivity as the essential basis of its own existence.

This insight may be extended beyond the scope of Baldwin's work to the sources of sovereignty and archism more generally. It may lead us to rethink Ernst Kantorowicz's insight that the king has two bodies: one spiritual and permanent and one human and mortal.[46] Analogous to the relationship set up in Baldwin's story, the point of this duality in the monarch may be to export the king's own humanness to other sources. Yes, the monarch has a human body, but by connection to a divine and immortal body, the king seeks to transcend death as such. Whereas the king's subjects are all condemned to be human and only human, to die (and the state can facilitate that death by engaging in executions), the monarch is in some sense above the fray. Even the king's eventual death isn't a full death because it is associated with a body that cannot die.

If we think of governmentality as the spread of the archist function from the state to the people it controls (at least the privileged

46. See Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957).

groups among those people), we can read white supremacy in the same way. What once was exclusively the monarch's prerogative, the ability to transcend mere humanity, now becomes more widely available; an entire population can transcend death (an idea implicit in the biopolitics discussed at greater length in the next chapter) by refusing to be mere bodies. Death is exported and projected onto other groups so that this favored group does not have to be fully and only human, does not really have to die—or, if they do die (which of course they will), their deaths will not be total, their status as belonging to whiteness ensures that some piece of them survives death by its association with this exalted identity (hence another version of a beautiful death). The *other* people are the true humans; they are the ones marked by death (and to make that clear, they must be subject to frequent and repeated visible acts of murder, rape, and domination). Here we see the way that sovereign violence becomes universalized, the basis for larger patterns of racism and genocide.

Nothing said so far is of any solace to the murdered black man depicted in Baldwin's text. Although it is a fictional account, it is certainly based on an enormous number of actual lynchings, actual tortures and deaths. In this case, the lynched black man is reduced to being merely an object, eventually "merely . . . a black charred object on the black charred ground." Baldwin does not tell us a single detail about this man—not his name, nothing about his family—only about his death, because that is all Jesse cared or thought about. Indeed, to focus on those other details threatens to make a connection between the lynched man and Jesse himself, who also has a family and a name, and risks bringing that death back onto Jesse himself.

Yet if the lynched man's life cannot be saved, there is at least the possibility that in Baldwin's hands, the tale of murder and white supremacy has been turned into its opposite: a tale of white impotence (in both a sexual and a political sense). Precisely because the act of lynching is so manifestly an act of archist projection, projecting a clear and ready-made image of black powerlessness and white triumph, to see this man's body as anything other than that is deeply

subversive to the cause of white supremacy.[47] Even without the personal details of his life, the murdered black man's reduction to being "only human" reveals the same thing in his murderers. It is as if the black man, in dying, puts his arms around his tormentors and drags them into the same condition he himself has been relegated to (or, more accurately, into the condition they have both been in all along). Baldwin's depiction of a lynching serves not (only) to give us a ghoulish rendition of a commonly occurring horror but to actively expose and upend a belief system that is mandatory for white supremacy to exist. Thus there is a modicum, not of justice (for there is nothing just in this story), but at least a kind of powerful response in this connection, a "return of the repressed" wherein death is given back—at first symbolically, but finally actually—to the one who would only give it to others.[48]

And there is a more positive feature of this reading as well. In Baldwin's idea of "earning" one's death, we see just the slightest outline of another approach to life oriented toward life and death alike, a way that, in my view, is anarchist in the true sense that it is entirely incompatible with archism. To think this way, it might be helpful to note that if death is a fact that cannot be denied, so is life or, perhaps more accurately, birth. Arendt shows that natality also cannot be read out of the world, and we are sandwiched between these two (and only two) facts of birth and death: life itself has an origin that cannot be fully determined by phantasm, and a life informed both by its birth and by its death is a very different life than the one archism seeks to dictate.

To "earn one's death," then, is to live a life in which the belief in death is central. This is not to say that one must spend one's life ceaselessly musing on its end (a dreary prospect if ever there was one); rather, one must let the "fact" of death, much like the fact of birth,

47. For more detail on the way lynching is a form of semiotic warfare, see David Marriott's *On Black Men* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000). Once again I am indebted to Linette Park for this suggestion.

48. *Revenge* might not be the right word to use here, since it reeks of violence and instrumentality itself, and what I'm talking about comes from not instrumentalizing death but deinstrumentalizing it. Whatever condition comes from that deinstrumentalization is what I mean by revenge—a form of some satisfaction that does not merely come from giving the racist lynch mob "a dose of its own medicine" (since it is precisely that "medicine" that is being challenged here).

serve as a way to defy archism's attempt to make life mean something of its own devising and nothing more. Arendt's key insight is that each birth heralds a new possibility, a contingent rupture in the way the "absolute" (another version of archism) threatens to control what life is and does. And death does the same thing. Thanks to the bookends of life, we have a chance—but only a chance—to allow an aleatory and anarchist element into a life that is always otherwise being controlled and determined (although Arendt's own attitudes on race can be very problematical, so the addition of thinking of natality itself cannot entirely resolve the problem of white supremacy and its relationship to death).

When Baldwin says that white people do not believe in death, he implies that black people do (whether they like it or not). They have to believe in death because death has been given to them again and again in such tangible ways. This is not in and of itself a good thing, of course, given that it comes from such violence and destruction, but it means they have this resource more readily available. It means that the body of the lynched black man depicted in "Going to Meet the Man" is, in addition to being a sign of the power of white supremacy, also a marker of a death that defies that power, that undoes the phantasm that led to that killing in the first place. In our own time, when overt white supremacism is attempting—with quite a bit of success—to reassert itself more openly and brazenly, I think Baldwin's work is more timely—and informative—than ever.

Chapter Four
Unburied Bodies of Color

In this chapter, I will turn from a general conversation about the unburied dead to focus on what I started this book with: the image of Michael Brown lying dead in the street (and, by extension, the murdered bodies of color depicted in James Baldwin's "Going to See the Man" as well). In the case of Michael Brown, the fact that he was a black man is far from incidental: he died because he was black, and he was left lying unburied (and uncovered) because he was black. In thinking about the dead body of color—and, in this case, the dead black body, in particular—we seem to come to the ultimate sign of state (and quasi-state) power. While formally the United States (among most other modern nation-states) disavows all forms of racism and violence against people of color (although under President Trump this disavowal has become much thinner, almost to the vanishing point), in fact, state and social violence against bodies of color has a history that is much longer than that of the country itself. As is well known, not only did the United States participate in the slave trade and practice widespread domestic slavery, but the Constitution itself allowed for, indeed enshrined, slaveholding. The liberal tale about racism always claims that it is a remnant from preliberal times, and if there is any racism in this country, it is merely because liberalism hasn't been asserted enough. If liberalism were truly triumphant, this argument goes, there would be no racists and no racially motivated killings by the police and other state and governmental actors. The liberal universal, this argument goes on to say, is truly capacious enough to hold all human beings (never mind the quibbling over who counts and who doesn't count as human).

Yet this story is perhaps the greatest phantasm—or projection—of them all. The United States is and has been actively racist—and white supremacist—from its inception, and its entire history has been one of enslaving, defrauding, and killing people of color; the atrocities depicted in "Going to Meet the Man" are the veritable tip of the iceberg. In this way, the frequency with which black, Latinx, Muslim, Native American, and Asian and Pacific Islanders are rounded up, tortured, beaten, and killed with no reason at all is not some fluke that somehow "just keeps happening." It is part and parcel of a regime that is racist, and rotten, to the core.

Race and Biopolitics

As already noted, the kinds of extreme violence that racism tends to evoke are part and parcel of the age of biopolitics. As Michel Foucault shows us, racism is not merely a part of biopolitics—the form of rule that has both supplanted and merged with sovereignty in our time—but rather the core aspect of that practice. As Foucault famously describes it, "The right of sovereignty was the right to take life and let live. And then this new [biopolitical] right is established: the right to make live and let die."[1] To "make live" involves the control of human bodies and lives right down to the most minute and intimate details: "the ratio of births to deaths, the rate of reproduction, the fertility of the population and so on."[2] To "let die" indicates the changing nature of death as well. As Foucault asserts, under conditions of biopolitics, "death was no longer something that swooped down on life—as in an epidemic. Death was now something permanent, something that slips into life, perpetually gnaws at it, diminishes it and weakens it."[3] In the attempt to control life, there is also, as I have already discussed in previous chapters, a concomitant attempt to control death, to keep it at bay, or when the moment is deemed correct, to "let" it finally occur. (In fact, as with so many things, this pose of control disguises its opposite: an ongoing general—but not absolute, thanks to the workings of

1. Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976* (New York: Picador, 2003), 241.

2. Ibid., 243.

3. Ibid., 244.

modern medicine and other innovations—helplessness in the face of death.)[4]

Just as in "Going to Meet the Man," biopolitics represents an attempt to control—or if not to control, then to limit as much as possible—the presence of death. That struggle against death and mortality more generally moves from an individual body to the collective body of people (but crucially not *all* people).

As Foucault further reveals, once the move from sovereignty to biopolitics becomes more settled (not that sovereignty ever goes away; rather, it shifts in response to biopolitics and becomes what Bargu calls "biosovereignty"), the move from the state as the dealer of death (by execution) changes into the state as the regulator, along with many other forms of governmentality, seeking to "improve life by eliminating accidents, the random element, and deficiencies."[5] In this way, death becomes "beyond the reach of power, and power has a grip on it only in general, overall or statistical terms."[6]

For Foucault, the age of biopolitics is one in which death becomes a direct challenge to the dominant forms of power: "In the right of sovereignty, death was the moment of the most obvious and most spectacular manifestations of the absolute power of the sovereign; death now becomes, in contrast, the moment when the individual escapes all power, falls back on himself and retreats, so to speak, into his own privacy. Power no longer recognizes death. Power literally ignores death."[7] Although this seems to suggest that under conditions of sovereignty, death "works" for the state, I would slightly amend this to say that under conditions of sovereignty, it is the *appearance* that death is

4. In thinking about the modern attitude toward death, particularly in terms of the regime of medicine, I think of that old joke where someone who has a very disobedient dog tells the dog, "Just lie there; ignore me." That illusion of control (where the dog then "obeys" what has been commanded) is similar to the "control" over death promised by medicine but also by archism more generally. When people die (as they inevitably will), the state or governmental regime more generally effectively says, "OK, now you can die. I will finally allow it," as if it had the power to truly "let" someone die. Although, of course, the state and biopolitical actors can *cause* death (and do that all the time); they only have an impact on the matter of when someone dies, not over whether he or she dies at all. Similarly, medicine can prolong life, but it can't make anyone escape death altogether.

5. Foucault, *Society*, 248.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

being "controlled" by the state that is more prominent due to the state's easy, and visible, power to kill. In the current archist model framed by biopolitics, that control appears to be more elusive, hence the desire to "ignore" (i.e., to not believe in) death.

Because its original power over death must be manifestly visible, Foucault tells us that sovereignty necessarily takes on a new guise and role under conditions of biopolitics. Insofar as there is a shift in death (from the state meting it out to biopolitical regimes seeking to avoid death in any way possible), this poses a challenge for sovereignty. What can the state do when it can no longer kill? How will it justify or even express its existence? This, for Foucault, is where the question of race becomes preeminent for sovereign forms of authority. He writes,

> I am certainly not saying that race was invented at this time. It had already been in existence for a very long time. But I think it functioned elsewhere. It is indeed the emergence of this biopower that inscribes it in the mechanisms of the State. It is at this moment that racism is inscribed as the basic mechanism of power, as it is exercised in modern States. As a result, the modern State can scarcely function without becoming involved with racism at some point, within certain limits and subject to certain conditions.[8]

Racism, Foucault goes on to say, "introduce[s] the break between what must live and what must die."[9] Furthermore, "the appearance within the biological continuum of the human race of races, the distinction among races, the hierarchy of races, the fact that certain races are described as good and that others, in contrast, are described as inferior: all this is a way of fragmenting the field of the biological that power controls. It is a way of separating out the groups that exist within a population . . . That is the first function of racism: to fragment, to create caesuras within the biological continuum addressed by biopower."[10]

In other words, racism solves the dilemma of a state that has to help maintain the population it is interested in saving even as it must continue to deal out death. The state can continue to kill, continue to assert its "existence" (which it is forever compelled to do), under

8. Ibid., 254.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., 254–55.

conditions of biopolitics by cleaving off a part of the set of people it has to contend with and deeming them expendable. (In this regard, Agamben's notion of *homo sacer* can be extended to whole groups and races of people; they too, it could be said, "may be killed and yet not sacrificed.")[11]

And Foucault identifies a second purpose for racism as well; extending the metaphor of war to the regulation of populations and the disciplining of bodies (which are not the same thing for Foucault), the state in effect says, "The very fact that you let more die will allow you to live more."[12] In other words, by removing this part of the population (either outright through genocide or through techniques such as mass incarceration, ghettoization, etc.), the conditions for approved—that is white, normative, and so on—life are improved or made possible. Foucault writes, "The fact that the other dies does not mean simply mean that I live in the sense that his death guarantees my safety; the death of the other, the death of the bad race, of the inferior race (or the degenerate, or the abnormal) is something that will make life in general healthier; healthier and purer."[13]

Here the sovereign function is not merely preserved for its own sake but becomes indispensable to biopolitical forms of authority as well. Consistent with the core of archist phantasms, the killing of others is seen as enhancing and even making possible the protection of and caretaking for the privileged population, thus ensuring that sovereign political forms and the state's penchant for killing are preserved at the heart of the biopolitical (and now neoliberal) archist order.

This "them or us" model explains very well the phenomenon of lynching as described in "Going to Meet the Man" as well as the state's relationship to terrorism more generally. It makes very clear how it is possible to give "life" to one community (i.e., a sense of their own transcendence of inevitable mortality) by giving "death" to another.

Although, on the surface, this model seems to "dehumanize" the populations targeted for death, my reading of "Going to Meet the Man" (with some help from Nietzsche) suggests that once

11. Agamben, *Homo Sacer* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), 8.

12. Foucault, *Society*, 255.

13. Ibid.

again the privileged population appears to attempt to escape humanness by transcending it, by exporting its death and humanness to other people. Black people and other people of color are the mortal ones in this rendition, and their condition is marked, above all, by the presence and inevitability of death.

This is one place where thinking in terms of archism instead of states per se becomes helpful, especially given the way the state and other sovereign forms morph as they encounter other regimes and disciplinary forms. If we think of states as the be all and end all of politics, then we readily think that any threat to the state (such as biopolitics or neoliberalism) is a threat to any form of rule, inviting chaos and mayhem. To think instead of archism allows us to see, as Foucault shows us, that there is no necessary distinction between states and biopolitics and that they are subsumed under one complementary mechanism of power, disciplinarity, and governmentality. If archism is the broader phenomenon that encompasses not just states but governmentality more generally, biopolitics, neoliberalism, and capitalism as well are all interrelated. Even though we often think of these as being unrelated (even opposing) forces, they all work together to demonstrate and prove that they control and determine life, that the only possible choice is to live under archism or face imminent death.

When it comes to questions of race, especially in terms of the populations that are excluded from the protections of the state, that act of exclusion is not always straightforward. Even people of color—in the U.S. context, anyway—are presumably included to some limited degree within the biopolitical regime's umbrella of protection, although in their case, that patina of protection is razor thin, barely (if at all) credible.[14] To be black in America does not guarantee death, but it does remove a level of protection and recognition, and the life of a black person is therefore far more precarious and vulnerable (more human, once again) than that of a white person. Some other regimes, Nazi Germany being a prime example, drop this pretense completely

14. Here I am reminded of Trump's "appeal" to black Americans. He asked, "What do you have to lose [in supporting me]?" This question both cajoles (we can give you what liberals have failed to give you for years) and threatens (you have one thing to lose: your life, and that we will readily take away).

and declare full war on a targeted community (Jews, Roma, queer people, the disabled, communists, and others). Either way, the excluded community has a very tangible experience of its own marginalization, regardless of its official status or the degree to which its members are said to be included in the universal.

The Blankness of Race

In her own analysis of race as a means of determining human worth (who to "make live" and who to "let die," in Foucault's terms), Hortense Spillers argues that race "is not *simply* a metaphor and nothing more; it is the outcome of a politics . . . It is also a *complicated* figure, or metaphoricity, that demonstrates the power and danger of difference, that signs and assigns difference as a way to situate social subjects. If we did not already have 'race' and its quite impressive powers of proliferation, we would need to invent them. The social mechanism at work here is *difference in, and as, hierarchy*, although 'race' remains one of its most venerable master signs."[15] Race then for Spillers is the key marker of difference. It is how difference is considered and operationalized in contemporary states. It is present, she says, even in states that seem relatively racially homogenous. She argues, for example, that although Haiti, Somalia, and the former Yugoslavia seem not to be marked by "race as we understand it in the U.S. (i.e., as a question of skin color), nonetheless, in all three instances of community shattered by killing and violence, 'color' was—still is—displaced onto other features of the discriminatory. To that extent, 'race' marks both an in-itselfness and a figurative economy that can take on any number of different faces at the drop of a hat."[16] Thus race is a shifting, moving target; it is not inherent in skin color only (or even at all) but is generally a term for whatever mechanism of discrimination applies in a particular context.

As such, in thinking of Spillers's arguments in light of Foucault's own claims, it could be said that race is not only a projection; it is arguably *the* projection, the heart of the way that sovereignty and biopolitics

15. Hortense J. Spillers, "'All the Things You Could Be by Now, If Sigmund Freud's Wife Was Your Mother': Psychoanalysis and Race," in *Black, White and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 376–427, 380; emphasis original.

16. Ibid.

(i.e., once again, archism, at least in its current form) export and then seek to control their existential anxieties. Spillers argues that as the master signifier of difference (in keeping with Foucault's reading of race's role as well), race is also a kind of master fetish. She states that "unhooked from land, custom, language, lineage, and clan/tribal arrangements, modern 'race' joins the repertoire of fetish names bolstered by legislative strategy, public policy, and the entire apparatus of the courts and police force."[17]

For Spillers, the concept of race drowns out, submerges, and silences other forms of identity and solidarity: "What I am positing here is the *blankness* of 'race' where something else ought to be . . . the evacuation to be restituted and recalled as the discipline of a self-critical inquiry."[18]

The one thing I would add, taken from the previous discussion of Baldwin and Foucault, is that if race is, in fact, the master narrative of identity, *the* projection, its centrality is based, once again, on the way that it parses life from death—determining who must die so that others can escape, as it were, their own deaths.

Spillers's own focus is not on the relation between race and death—the way it is constructed to enable the escaping or limitation of death for some at the expense of others—but rather on life and the way it offers its own forms of resistance. She seeks to recuperate from the lives of black people those means by which they deny and thwart the death-dealing that they receive.

Spillers's reading of what she often calls "race" (in quotation marks) highlights its ambivalent qualities—its not-quite-realness and its metaphoricity. Given this vulnerability (which matches, and I would say reflects, the ephemeral and vulnerable nature of archism as well), Spillers speaks of "a power that counterveils another by an ethical decision."[19] She looks to the restitution and recall of that which race erases not so much to expose the "true nature" of identity beneath it but simply to recover all those qualities and attributes—all the life, that is—that race occludes as it divides and conquers.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., 385.

19. Ibid.

For Spillers, Fanon's own analysis of black subjectivity is problematic because it effectively describes an impossible situation. She writes, "It seems to me that the Fanonian approach to the psychoanalytic object [i.e., the nature of black subjectivity that he'd like to redeem] spins its wheels because it cannot discover a practice of 'disalienation' (Fanon's word for it) within the resources of black culture, or an ethical position that is worth delineating according to the *future* of those cultures."[20] For Spillers, Fanon's error is to assume that the black subject has the white subject (and hence the colonial relationship) continually before her. Spillers looks to black culture, black experience, and black identity and kinship as an alternative: "In place of the Fanonian narrative, I should like to intrude a slightly different one: if psychic economy 'grows,' as it were, with the historical subject, doesn't she have one long before she 'knows' that there is a 'white man' and certainly well in advance of her caring about him at all? If black is 'normal,' so long as . . . , then mustn't this normalcy persist in an economized relationship to the shock/trauma of white encounter?"[21] Spillers is looking for agency even in the context of the fetishism of the black/white binarism by decentering it. She does not so much move off from Fanon as seek to "have recourse to Fanon in a post-Fanonian juncture" based on his dynamism and the complexity and evolution of his thought.[22]

Spillers makes a somewhat related point about W. E. B. DuBois. In his case, she argues:

> …in working with the DuBoisian double [the double consciousness produced by the color line] we recover the sociopolitical dimensions that classical psychoanalysis and its aftermath sutured in a homogeneity of class interests, just as DuBois' scheme must be pressured toward a reopened closure: the subject in the borrowed mirror is essentially mute. DuBois is speaking for him. It is time now, if it were not in 1903, for him to speak for himself, if he dares. That this speaking will not be simple is all the more reason why it must be done.[23]

In both the case of Fanon and DuBois's thought, Spillers is reckoning with the effects of projection and fetishism. The double consciousness

20. Ibid., 391; emphasis original.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., 393.

23. Ibid., 398.

DuBois evokes, or the effect of whiteness (a kind of colonization of the black subject) for Fanon, are products of that process of phantasmic projection. Although she recognizes that these subjects of color are facing what can only be called a killing machine, Spillers is much more interested in what people of color—and, in particular, black people—can do about this *while they are alive*. She sees in life itself (and Saidiya Hartman, as I'll discuss soon, has a similar view) the possibilities for resistance even despite the ongoing network of racism and violence that the black subject is continually exposed to.

In her desire to have the black subject speak for herself (a question I'll also revisit in the conclusion), Spillers is offering that it is both possible and necessary to have agency and voice even amid the various projections that constitute the conditions of being a person of color in the contemporary world. Spillers's work does not speak of an "authentic" black voice; her use of quotation marks around the term *race* suggests the way that identity is an ongoing and fluid phenomenon for her. Rather, the voice she is speaking of comes out of the same contingent and highly politicized grounds as the fetishized forms of subjectivity she is struggling against. Her point is that this fetishized subject is not the *only* kind of subject there is. Rather than cede the entirety of subjectivity to racist schemas, Spillers seeks to recuperate, from amid this troubled field of signification, a voice and a place for black people.[24]

This is a contestation, as already noted, that arises from and among the living; Spillers's interest is not in the dead, nor in "necroresistance." In the conclusion, I argue that the dead can nonetheless contribute to the conversations among the living that Spillers is interested in having, and these ways of speaking are complementary (or perhaps coconspiratorial) to her own strategies and thoughts (and, once again,

24. Critically, this place is not "a place at the table" along with white people, the liberal answer to the problem of race. If I have been persuasive about the way race is tied up with death and archism, with allowing one group to transcend death by dealing that death to a different group, then to have blacks join whites would simply mean that some other group would have to die instead. "Whiteness" may be highly expandable (the Irish, the Jews, and perhaps now some groups of Asians have been and still can be integrated into its capacity), but it is not infinitely so in the sense that it could include literally everyone. Some other group needs to be condemned to violence so that whiteness itself can live and, more than live, transcend the death that otherwise delimits its life (and Frank Wilderson for one would deny that such an inclusion of black people could ever be possible).

recognize how race is always tied up with death and, more precisely, its denial, at least for some).

For the time being, however, in anticipation of that conversation, let me turn to a few other thinkers who do talk about race, sovereignty, and violence in ways that include the dead to show how death itself can have a salutary (or at least not utterly negative) and limiting effect on the otherwise seemingly endless power that comes with biopolitics and its violent effects.

Necropower

In his work, Achille Mbembe takes up where Foucault leaves off, arguing that biopower, in its desire to distinguish between who is disposable and who must be protected, produces a corollary power that Mbembe calls "necropower."[25] This notion has already been alluded to in Bargu's concept of "necropolitical violence." Mbembe points to the modern-day administration and domination of Palestine, for example, as "the most accomplished form of necropower."[26] This power is marked by the fracturing of Palestinian territory into increasingly smaller and more delimited spaces both horizontally and vertically. The application of necropower, according to Mbembe, can be seen quite clearly in the West Bank, for example (or in particular), where the same spaces are occupied by two people: one set whose lives are to be protected at all costs (the Israelis) and one whose existence is constantly under question (the Palestinians). In this territory, a complex network of walls, highway overpasses (for the Israelis), dirt roads (for the Palestinians), checkpoints, drones, and bulldozers add up to what Mbembe calls "infrastructural warfare":[27]

> The *state of siege* is itself a military institution. It allows a mode of killing that does not distinguish between the external and internal enemy. Entire populations are the target of the sovereign. The besieged villages and towns are sealed off and cut off from the world. Daily life is militarized. Freedom is given to local military commanders to use their discretion as to when and whom to shoot. Movement between the territorial cells requires formal permission. Local civic institutions are systematically destroyed. The besieged

25. Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11–40, 27.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid, 29.

> population is deprived of their means of income. Invisible killing is added to outright executions.[28]

This kind of total power is not limited to Palestine, of course. Mbembe notes how increasingly war is becoming routinized as a way of life, with many states in Africa and the Middle East increasingly decomposing into zones of conflict marked by intense resource extraction and the transformation of the local populations into "citizen soldiers, child soldiers, mercenaries and privateers" or their victims.[29]

According to Mbembe, this actually represents an increase from the violence of colonialization. He writes,

> This form of governmentality is different from the colonial *commandement*. The techniques of policing and discipline and the choice between obedience and simulation that characterized the colonial and postcolonial potentate are gradually being replaced by an alternative that is more tragic because more extreme. Technologies of destruction have become more tactile, more anatomical and sensorial, in a context in which the choice is between life and death. If power still depends on tight control over bodies (or on concentrating them in camps), the new technologies of destruction are less concerned with inscribing bodies within disciplinary apparatuses as inscribing them, when the time comes, within the order of the maximal economy now represented by the "massacre."[30]

Speaking specifically to the phenomenon of the suicide bomber, Mbembe says that with life so marginalized, the line between being alive and dead blurs. With the suicide bomber, homicide and suicide merge, and the death of the self becomes the death of the other at the same moment. For Mbembe, the power of necropolitics has been turned back upon itself; death, the ultimate limit of the biopolitical, becomes a weapon of resistance:

> In its desire for eternity, the besieged body passes through two stages. First, it is transformed into a mere thing, malleable matter. Second, the manner in which it is put to death—suicide—affords it its ultimate signification. The matter of the body, or again the matter which is the body, is invested with properties that cannot be deduced from its character as a thing, but from a transcendental *nomos* outside it. The besieged body becomes a piece of metal

28. Ibid., 30. A very similar argument can be found in Eyal Weizman's *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (New York: Verso, 2012).

29. Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 32.

30. Ibid., 34.

> whose function is, through sacrifice, to bring eternal life into being. The body duplicates itself and, in death, literally and metaphorically escapes the state of siege and occupation.[31]

Here, because the population has been rendered disposable and has only death to look forward to (via necropower), death itself becomes a source of agency. Mbembe writes that "death is precisely that from and over which I have power."[32] Insofar as in the modern world we have what Mbembe calls "death-worlds"—vast populations that have been reduced to a form of "living death"—necropolitics, that most violent and extreme form of biopolitics (the part of biopolitics concerned with the killing and disposal of the other), acts back upon biopolitics itself, becoming a basis of resistance via the very operations that have led the subject to its ultimate weakness and subjugation.[33]

As we have already seen, Bargu applies this same notion in her study of the Death Fasters in Turkey, and many other movements have used bodies and death as a form of resistance to biopower. Stuart Murray, in his own work, speaks of a "thanatopolitics"[34] that becomes a form of resistance that escapes the totalizing logic of biopolitics precisely because it lies at the limit of what biopolitics can manage—namely, death itself.

Like Mbembe, Murray uses the concept of the suicide bomber as an example: "[The suicide bomber] destroys the very condition of possibility for biopolitical regulation and control."[35] Murray argues that while it is clearly a negative power, thanatopolitics is also "*productive*—it produces something, it has independent rhetorical effects which are not easily comprehended within a biopolitical logic."[36]

In discussing these issues, I do not want to give the impression that engaging in thanatopolitics means that one has somehow escaped from projection or mythic violence. Clearly in the case of suicide bombers, in particular, even if they are destructive to biopolitics, they are often

31. Ibid., 37.

32. Ibid., 39.

33. Ibid., 40.

34. Stuart J. Murray, "Thanatopolitics: On the Use of Death for Mobilizing Political Life," *Polygraph* 18 (2006): 195.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

motivated by ideologies that are based on other projections, phantasms, and ideologies that justify and sponsor their actions in the first place (and the case of ISIS and its attempted restoration of the caliphate, for one, indicates that these projections are not necessarily innocent of sovereignty and archism either). In that way, they could be said to be engaging in death instrumentally—that is, continuing to project onto death what the dead can do for the living.

As Bargu describes them, the Death Fasters, I would say, are generally operating with a different calculus; they turn to death as a way to break apart rather than to consolidate such projections. While they too turn to death as a way to break from biopolitical power, I think they are closer to the model of letting the dead influence the living than many suicide bombers (depending, of course, on the context and motivation of each actor). One could say that rather than seeking to instrumentalize death, the Death Fasters are letting death instrumentalize them. But that isn't quite right either; I think in the case of the Death Fasters, we see not instrumentality at all but rather deinstrumentalization—a kind of comradeship between the living and the dead (including all the states in between). This represents a violation of the absolute limit drawn between life and death that is the hallmark of archism and its racist expressions and, in this way, is very radical indeed. The role of death changes from a limit to an opening, and a very different politic ensues.

As I've noted, the dead confer a kind of power on the living, if only the living are receptive to it. If that power is taken as a tool, an instrument against the state, neocolonialism, or other forms of illicit archist violence, then I think it is limited in terms of what it can accomplish. It may well destroy this or that particular objective, but I think it is the equivalent, to some extent, of the political strike Benjamin describes in his "Critique of Violence." It uses, to some extent, the same mythic violence that can be found within sovereignty against that form of authority. In this way, it is, to use Audre Lorde's adage, a case of "using the master's tools to dismantle the master's house," with predictably problematic outcomes.[37]

37. This is a loose paraphrase from Audre Lorde's statement that "the Master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," the title of a talk she gave at the Second Sex Conference in 1979.

Because the Death Fasters allow death to be part of their lives and their resistance, they aren't "using the master's tools" so much as engaging with their own bodies in the fullest possible way, including their bodies' own deaths (so that the master's tools become something else, something akin to what Benjamin calls "pure means").[38] In this way, the Death Fasters "believe in death." They come much closer to Benjamin's model of the general strike; however, they are not striking back at the state with their own projection and mythic violence but allowing the antiprojective power of death to break apart the sovereign phantasms they are resisting.

The Death Fasters aren't always specifically oriented against racialized sovereign violence, although the Turkish state certainly does express itself in a racialized medium. Even so, it offers a model for how death can be incorporated into forms of resistance in terms of more explicitly racialized forms of sovereign violence. If racism is the mechanism by which death is avoided or delimited by biopolitical power, the disruption of that mechanism by death shows that biopolitical power remains vulnerable, dependent on the phantasm that death can be overcome. Here again, the body can be the site of maximal sovereign and archist projection even as it is also the site of maximal resistance and undermining of that mechanism.

Social Death and the Black Body in the United States

If we turn from a discussion of racism, biopolitics, and necropolitics in general to the specific experience of people of color and, more specifically, black people in the United States, we come closer to understanding the circumstances that led to the display of Michael Brown's dead body in the streets of Ferguson, Missouri. To begin with, black people in the United States—and in the western hemisphere more generally—have a particular history that goes beyond the confines of the discussion of racism that Foucault engages in. Orlando Patterson has helped popularize the phrase "social death" as it is applies to African Americans, and the African diaspora more generally, in light of their experience of the Middle Passage and slavery.

38. Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, vol. 1, *1913–1926* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 246.

The phrase "social death" comes from the work of French anthropologists Claude Meillassoux and Michel Izard. Patterson quotes Meillassoux as writing about the experience of the newly enslaved that (according to Meillassoux) "the captive always appears therefore as marked by an original, indelible defect which weighs endlessly upon his destiny."[39] Patterson goes on to write, "This is, in Izard's words, a kind of 'social death,' He [the slave] can never be brought to life again as such since, in spite of some specious examples (themselves most instructive) of fictive rebirth, the slave will remain forever an unborn being (non-né)."[40] For Patterson, slavery is thus not simply an economic arrangement but a kind of ontological transformation of the enslaved body. He writes, "Slavery is the permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonored persons."[41]

In a similar mode, citing the "new forms of bondage" that arose in post–Civil War relationships with formally freed slaves, Saidiya V. Hartman points out that "emancipation appears less the grand event of liberation than a point of transition between modes of servitude and racial subjection."[42] For Hartman, as for Patterson, the trauma of slavery cannot be reduced to the fact that human beings were being treated like objects. Far more insidious (and therefore lasting beyond the formal temporality of slavery itself) are the ways that slaves were understood as belonging to an entirely—and ontologically—different category than white people in the United States. Hartman goes on to say, "The value of blackness reside[s] in its metaphorical aptitude, whether literally understood as the fungibility of the commodity or understood as the imaginative surface upon which the master and the nation came to understand themselves."[43]

For Hartman, this fungible aspect of black identity, the way it serves as a screen for the anxieties and phantasms of white America—and even aided in its production—ensured that the transition from slavery

39. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 38.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid., 13.

42. Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 6.

43. Ibid., 7.

to freedom was nothing like the tremendous progress for black people it is often lauded as being. In the post–Civil War era, when it came to the question of black freedom and equality, Hartman argues, "although the Thirteenth Amendment abolished the institution of slavery, the vestiges of slavery still acted to constrict the scope of black freedom. It proved virtually impossible to break with the past because of the endurance of involuntary servitude and the reinscription of racial subjection. Rather, what becomes starkly apparent are the continuities of slavery and freedom as modes of domination, exploitation and subjection."[44] In Hartman's view, racism was allowed to flourish alongside the creation of formal regimes of equality in the wake of the Thirteenth Amendment. Even as arguments over whether the abolishment of slavery was the equivalent of granting citizenship to former slaves were concluded in favor of such citizenship, a complex network of both overt and hidden forms of discrimination (ranging from the Black Codes to *Plessy v. Ferguson*) was developed to keep the black community dominated and disenfranchised. As Hartman further explains,

> The federal government sanctioned the white supremacist laws of the states by recourse to the separation of powers, state sovereignty, and declared noninterference. The incapacity of federal law and the remove of the state regulated the very domain they identified as beyond their reach. The focus on sentiment and affinity disavowed the state's role in the private and the governance of the social exercised through police power. Therefore, although it appeared that the state refused to intervene in the private by declaring it a law-free and voluntary sphere, the state was already there and actively governing the conducts of individuals. This disavowed regulation of the private engendered the subordination of blacks while claiming the noninvolvement of the state. Yet aversive sentiment rather than state policy was held responsible for this separation and isolation of blacks from the rest of the population.[45]

Here racism is falsely held as a purely private and personal matter; the state's active racist interventions are disguised, and the state is seen as racially "neutral" even as it serves as a major tool to continue unabated racial discrimination. This sets the stage for the state up to this very day, when mass black imprisonment, the murdering state

44. Ibid., 172.

45. Ibid., 201.

(including the killing of Michael Brown), and other aspects of active state racism are rampant and structural. The Trump administration's intense and overt racism is not a radical break with past practices but rather just a new iteration of a racism that has always been central even if not always acknowledged.

Perhaps the key point I would stress in Hartman's work is that via institutional racism, black people bear the full brunt of white projection and phantasm. Because of the fungibility she describes, although black people have narratives of their own, these are effectively robbed of their efficacy (as well as their counterprojectional power) as far as their social, political, and economic positions are concerned. In a society already constituted by what Walter Benjamin calls "mythic violence," black people are generally on the receiving end in Hartman's view. Their recourses are limited by the intense dissymmetry they experience in terms of narrative authority.

The Nonbeing of Blackness

Hartman's work often overlaps with what has come to be known as "Afro-pessimism," a school of thought perhaps best known from the works of Frank Wilderson III and Jared Sexton. These thinkers argue that the ontological status (or, more accurately, the lack of such a status) conferred upon black people has profound and permanent effects on the condition of black people not only in the United States but around the world. I've been speaking of black people and people of color more generally as being similarly targeted by the state and social forms of racism, but for these thinkers, there is something beyond racism involved in the treatment of black people; instead, there is a categorical denial of black people even from the ranks of personhood (something that is extended, in this view, to other people of color as badly and as violently as they have been treated).[46]

As Wilderson writes, "Forced labor is not constitutive of enslavement because whereas it explains a common practice, it does not define the structure of the power relation between those who are slaves and those who are not. . . . Patterson helps us denaturalize the link between force and labor so that we can theorize the former as a phenomenon

46. I am indebted to Linette Park for this insight.

that positions a body, ontologically (paradigmatically), and the latter as a possible but not inevitable experience of someone who is socially dead."[47] For Wilderson, slavery per se—the forced labor of African people in various contexts, including in the United States—is not the critical factor in determining social death. Instead, social death is itself the category that presupposes slavery; it is a particular ontological status that persists regardless of any and all formal (or even informal) changes in the lives of black people.

Wilderson demonstrates what he means by social death when he considers Fanon's thoughts about the suffering of Jews in the Holocaust versus black people's suffering in the face of slavery. He writes,

> Whereas Humans exist on some plane of being and thus can become existentially present through some struggle for, of, or through recognition, Blacks cannot reach this plane. Spillers, Fanon, and Hartman maintain that the violence that continually repositions the Black as a void of historical movement is without analog in the suffering dynamics of the ontologically alive. The violence that turns Africans into a thing is without analog because it does not simply oppress the Black through tactile and empirical technologies of oppression . . . The Black's first ontological instance, the Middle Passage "wiped out [his or her] metaphysics . . . his [or her] customs and sources on which they are based." Jews went into Auschwitz and came out as Jews. Africans went into the ships and came out as Blacks. The former is a Human holocaust; the latter is a Human *and* a metaphysical holocaust. That is why it makes little sense to attempt analogy; the Jews have the Dead (the *Muselmann*) among them; the Dead have the Blacks among them.[48]

Leaving aside the fact that the whole point of Auschwitz was for Jews—and Roma, queers, communists, and others—to not come out at all, Wilderson is very clear about what he thinks is distinctive about the status of black people. It is not just that they have a worse ontological status than others but rather that they don't actually have an ontological status at all.

This, then, is Wilderson's definition of social death; he means the term quite literally. For Wilderson, blacks have been relegated to a subhuman or nonhuman category as an effect of social death (as when he writes about "the relationship between the world of Blacks and the

47. Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010), 14.

48. Ibid., 38. Wilderson is here quoting Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 110.

world of Humans").[49] This appears to fly in the face of my own earlier contention that the point of antiblackness is not so much to take humanity away from black people as to save white people from the fate of being merely human (leaving black people as being all too human in the process). Without getting into too much semantic parsing, I would say that for Wilderson, the emphasis is perhaps not on humanness so much as human *being*, which is to say that black people, as opposed to white people (and in his view, other people of color as well), *aren't* at all. To say that black people are denied an ontological status means that their form of existence is not recognized as even counting as an existence, a position that is far different from the kinds of hierarchical relationships set up by racism (that's why Afro-pessimists often speak of "antiblackness" instead of racism, treating it as a separate category). If Meillassoux and Izard speak of black people becoming unborn beings, perhaps for Wilderson one could speak of human *unbeings*.

In Wilderson's view, the fact that there can be a black president, black colleagues mixing with whites and others at work and school, or black films projecting living, breathing black people is irrelevant. The equivalencies these instances suggest are based on analogies between blackness and nonblackness in his view, and as he shows in the passage above, those analogies are always false, with no basis in reality because reality itself, the ability to have an analogous life, is precisely what black people are denied.[50]

For Wilderson, the question of ontology is determinant (as ontological categories are wont to be), so in this way, the white Left is as guilty as the more overtly racist white Right of denying ontology to black people. Wilderson tells us that this refusal of ontology constitutes a "scandal" that interferes with and trounces leftist categories of

49. Ibid., 15.

50. In this way, Wilderson is not unlike Fanon, who also sees that reality is entirely constructed by colonialism. Thus in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon writes, "Ontology—once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the way side—does not permit us to understand the being of the black man. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man. Some critics will take it on themselves to remind us that this proposition has a converse. I say that this is false. The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man." Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 110.

analysis.[51] This is a scandal because even the basic categories of Marxist (and particularly, in this case, Gramscian) analysis, such as proletariat and bourgeoisie, presuppose a racist division of labor that, for Wilderson, is prior to and required for those other antagonisms. Wilderson argues that "slavery . . . is closer to capital's primal desire than is waged oppression—the 'exploitation' of unraced bodies."[52] From this, he concludes, "Thus the black subject position in America is an antagonism, a demand that can not be satisfied through a transfer of ownership/organization of existing rubrics; whereas the Gramscian subject, the worker, represents a demand that can indeed be satisfied by way of a successful War of Position, which brings about the end of exploitation."[53] In this way, we see that whereas intra-white oppression can be resolved, that resolution does not and cannot touch the more fundamental antagonism organized around black social death. The black subject's nonontological status reveals the true heart of capitalist exploitation (what Wilderson also calls the "libidinal economy") not merely to oppress but to utterly embody that oppression in black bodies in a way that cannot be remedied by mere redistributions of power or resources.[54]

Challenging Social Death

The idea of "social death" is not uncontroversial (to put it mildly), and a great many scholars reject it outright. Neil Roberts, for one, argues that the idea of social death ignores a phenomenon that occurred both during slavery itself and in its aftermath—namely, the acts of marronage. Whereas for Wilderson black freedom is precisely what is impossible, for Roberts, marronage *is* a form of freedom based in flight. As already noted, it ranges from minor acts of insurgency on slave plantations to full-bore "sociogenic marronage," the creation of new worlds and new lives on the periphery (but still in the context) of slavery and what follows.[55] Roberts writes, "Marronage operates against the presumption that slaves exist in a state of 'social death.'

51. Frank Wilderson III, "Gramsci's Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society?," *Social Identities* 9, no. 2 (2003): 225.

52. Ibid., 229–30.

53. Ibid., 231.

54. Wilderson, *Red, White and Black*, 17.

55. Neil Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 10.

In the language of voudou, social death is the life of a zombie, a being roaming the earth with glazed eyes, lacking the ability to control its actions, an entity neither dead nor alive . . . The idea of social death denies the significance of psychology to freedom, rendering it unable to explain how slaves are able to become free physically outside the actions and intentions of enslaving agents."[56]

For Roberts a great deal of agency exists in even the most apparently passive and powerless of conditions (an idea I have already extended to include the murdered and unburied body). He rejects the idea of "social death" because he thinks, somewhat akin to Spillers, that within the confines of the black experience and black life, there are resources to draw upon to defy the doom that the concept of "social death" seems to describe.

Such a possibility can also be seen in Hartman's work to some extent (although she is often herself considered an Afro-pessimist or at least someone who shares a lot of thinking with that point of view). In her understanding, alongside the impossible and subjected identities that African Americans have had to occupy and deploy amid the reign of state domination, violence, and murder, there is also a form of resistance that parallels and subverts such performances. Looking, for example, at slave dances, holiday fêtes, and other forms of what she calls "orchestrations of blackness," Hartman writes,[57] "How does one determine the difference between 'puttin' on ole massa'—the simulation of compliance for covert aims—and the grins and gesticulations of Sambo indicating the repressive construction of contented subjugation? At the level of appearance, these contending performances often differed little. At the level of effect, however, they diverged radically. One performance aimed to reproduce and secrete the relations of domination and the other to manipulate appearances in order to challenge those relations and create a space for action not generally available."[58]

This is akin to the kinds of "arts of resistance" that James Scott describes in his own work on forms of defiance and subversion that fly under the radar of dominant powers, often using acts of seeming

56. Ibid., 117.

57. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 8.

58. Ibid.

subjection as a device to undermine that power relationship.[59] As Scott tells us, when we only follow the dominant narrative of a particular political situation, shy of open revolt, we tend to read a situation as absolutely passive and quiescent. But when we pay attention to what Scott calls the "hidden transcript," we see that resistance is going on all the time even if it is not recognized as such.[60] The point of such thinking is to say, as with Roberts, that even the most abject situation is not free of resistance (and therefore not free of freedom either). And these forms of resistance are not merely a way to "blow off steam" or keep the status quo going; as Scott further states, these microresistances serve as dress rehearsals for open insurrection so that when that day comes, everyone already knows what to do.

Something of this argument is also present in Spillers's desire to see African Americans speak with their own voices, even if these voices have seemingly been eclipsed or captured by dominant hierarchies. These resources and possibilities definitely come from the world of the living and not from the dead, even the socially dead.

Defying Nonontology

It seems, then, that there may be an irreconcilable divide between thinkers like Roberts on the one hand and Afro-pessimists like Wilderson on the other. A resolution between these positions may be neither possible nor even desirable.[61] But clearly the idea of social death evokes ideas that I have been discussing in this book, especially in terms of the degree to which social death approaches actual death and its relationship to resistance.

The idea of social death offers us a bit of a paradox on this question. On the one hand, similar to previous points made in earlier chapters, being socially dead cannot be exactly the same as being actually dead. This again comes down to a question of projection. As long as they

59. See James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990).

60. Ibid.

61. For a set of writings that doesn't try to reconcile these positions but seeks to occupy the space between them, see the special issue of *Theory and Event* 21, no. 1 (January 2018), on black feminism and Afro-pessimism, edited by Tiffany Willoughby Herard and M. Shadee Malaklou.

are living (even if not being), the socially dead remain creatures of projection (as Hartman also suggests). If dead bodies do a better job of avoiding projection than living ones, then the socially dead remain vulnerable to the traps and allures of archism, although not necessarily in any way that is final and determinant.

On the other hand, if we grant Wilderson the point that the socially dead are *effectively* the same as the actually dead, this may not be the end of the story. In my way of thinking, social death could be seen as an opportunity for accessing precisely those counterprojective powers of the dead that are not otherwise as readily available to the living, thus avoiding or at least tempering the loss of agency and personhood that otherwise goes with the position of social death.

Either way, I would say that the socially dead are not entirely cut off from the dead's powers or influence and therefore have resources available to them that come through and from their position as such. The dead's counterprojective powers are available to all, "even [to] the dead" themselves. The question then becomes, What approach toward death (and life) will or can the socially dead take? What choices are available to them?

Here it becomes important to recall my point that the antiblackness of archism stems from the desire to transcend or at least delimit and control death by exporting it and associating it with black bodies. If this argument is convincing, it demonstrates a key point of resistance for the socially dead—namely, the question that Baldwin poses of whether or not one can "believe" in or "earn" one's death. Let me cite that passage from *The Fire Next Time* once again for reference:

> Perhaps the whole root of our trouble, the human trouble, is that we will sacrifice all the beauty of our lives, will imprison ourselves in totems, taboos, crosses, blood sacrifices, steeples, mosques, races, armies, flags, nations in order to deny the fact of death, which is the only fact we have. It seems to me that one ought to rejoice in the *fact* of death—ought to decide, indeed, to *earn* one's death by confronting with passion the conundrum of life. One is responsible to life: it is the small beacon in that terrifying darkness from which we come and to which we must return. One must negotiate this passage as nobly as possible, for the sake of those who are coming after us. But white Americans do not believe in death, and this is why the darkness of my skin so intimidates them.[62]

62. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 91–92.

Here Baldwin is talking about the living, and the way that they are directly affected by death and the dead in a racialized context. Blackness, as he tells us, frightens whites because it suggests the failure of their own conquest of death, their own attempts to export it to black people. Whites do not believe in death because they have tried (and failed) to instrumentalize it; no amount of lynching and murder has succeeded in making them truly immortal, truly transcendent of the human condition. Black people, on the other hand, *do* believe in death (they have no choice but to do so in some sense because that death is rubbed in their faces every day), but they have a second goal to reach: not just to believe but to "earn" that death as well.

As I read Baldwin, this means that black people cannot simply rely on the way that the facticity of death affects them. If that were enough in and of itself, then the mere fact of being killed or even the fact of living in the shadow of death would be enough to resist white supremacy as such. To "earn" one's death, then, is not simply to recognize the power and agency of death, the way it delimits life, but also in some sense to engage with that agency in a way that increases the agency of living black people as well. Saying, "One is responsible to life . . . One must negotiate this passage as nobly as possible for those who are coming after us," Baldwin offers that a life lived in the face of death, perhaps even within the status of nonontology, can be a positive life, one that affects not only the living but also the not yet alive. But this positivity is not automatic; it is not the silver lining to oppression. That positive vision must be earned, thought and acted out. Here we can see how for the living, letting themselves be affected by the dead is not some easy quick fix but a long and difficult endeavor (as Antigone and the Death Fasters suggest as well).

In this way, Baldwin presents us with a choice, a question of how to respond to death. Whites can choose to continue to believe in the "Dream" of whiteness, of their own immortality and their ability to escape death by passing it on to people of color. They can continue to live a lie and to maintain their own nothingness (in the guise of doing the opposite). Black people can choose this route as well, turning to a language of victimization and rights as a way to minimize the degree to which death is dealt to them, trusting and hoping the

state won't choose to kill them or their loved ones on that particular day (or ever).

To choose the other way, to come first to believe in death and then to earn it, means to give up on the dreams of immortality (if not literally, at least symbolically, which can have the power and effect of reality itself) and accept the status of mere—and mortal—humanity. For those whites at the pinnacle of archist authority, this choice may seem impossible; it means giving up everything they've been promised (even if they haven't obtained everything, or even anything, that they believe to be their birthright). Even recognizing this as a possible choice is difficult because the power of white supremacy rests on naturalizing and obliterating its own constructed nature, its dependence on violence toward black and brown bodies to exist at all. (As Althusser writes, "Ideology never says: 'I am ideological.'")[63] Even so, recognized or misrecognized, this choice will always remain available to white people, and some will and some have chosen it.

For black people at the receiving end of murderous racist violence, this choice may seem far less impossible, as they have far less to lose. But even in this case, such a choice is not easy; it requires giving up on so much that is promised, so much of the recognition and associated rewards that the state and the liberal capitalist world pretend are available to all. To make this choice requires the courage of refusal, a courage that someone like Fanon (but also Hartman, Moten, Spillers, Coates, Roberts, Wilderson, and so many others) embodies and demonstrates.

This choice offers no guarantees whatsoever, but it might allow the subjects who learn to earn their death a form of agency that the confines of interpellated subjectivity, the strictures of racialized hierarchies, and the general pursuit of nothingness in the guise of authority and law (that is to say, the basis of archism) all serve to prevent and dispel. When they allow themselves to be affected by the dead, the living get an opportunity but nothing more; just as Baldwin says, they must earn what comes next. To earn one's death also means to earn one's life (this, I think, is implicit in everything that Baldwin says).

63. Althusser, "Ideology and the State," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 118.

Although I have been speaking largely in terms of a black and white binary, I would, probably contra Wilderson and Sexton, include people of color more generally in this discussion.[64] Even if we accept the argument about social death being something unique to black people (and this is hardly a settled argument), people of color more generally have certainly been the disproportionate recipients of state and social killing in the United States and other settler colonial nations. Even if there is no analogy with antiblackness to be made, there are resources in death that all people of color (and white co-conspirators for that matter) may partake in, ways to fight together and separately against the instrumentalized mechanics of archism and its death dealing ways.

All of the living can believe in death because every living person is mortal. Yet not all of the living are so shadowed by death that such a belief becomes tangible enough to override the vast complexes of misrecognition and phantasm that must be overcome. And, as already noted, not all receptions of violence and death may be the same. Social death may have its own particular effects and strategies, reflecting the way that the socially dead are not deemed to be beings at all. It may be too that when actually dead, a socially dead person's status is unlike that of others who have been killed by the state (to keep with Wilderson's idea of nonontology, because you can't kill someone who is already dead). Even so, once actually and literally dead, all bodies resist the narratives of archist construction, including the category of social death itself. This is not to say that in death all bodies become the same (to think that would be to return us to yet another archist and liberal phantasm) but rather to say that in death, new forms of resistance become possible that supersede many of the strictures and dogmas that organize the world of the living, often with radical results.

In the difficult forms of negotiation that Baldwin calls for, the living have one critical coconspirator—the dead themselves. Although it is not quite right to speak of the dead as having a choice of their own, they do help make this choice more possible for those who are still alive, even the socially dead.

64. In "People-of-Color Blindness," Jared Sexton explains his position that nonblackness and blackness are a better binary than whiteness and people of color insofar as blackness lies at the root of abjection, a fact no political movement can afford to forget. See Jared Sexton, "People-of-Color Blindness: Notes on the Afterlife of Slavery," *Social Text* 28, no. 2, 103 (Summer 2010): 31–56. I am indebted to Linette Park for this connection.

The dead stand as living proof, if you will, that the instrumentalization of life and death will ultimately fail, and in this failure, there is some degree of redemption—at least potentially—from the violence and phantasmic politics of archism, antiblackness, and racism more generally.

The Murder of Michael Brown: Refusing to Stand

This discussion sets the context to finally turn to an examination of the death of Michael Brown, just one of countless black people and other people of color whom the police or other biopolitical actors have wantonly killed and often left in full public view. His is just one body, but due to the endless repetitive nature of state and societal killing of black and brown people, he stands in for thousands or millions of other dead black bodies—some noted, the vast majority not. His body therefore bears an enormous representational weight, a weight put to powerful and radical purpose by Black Lives Matter.

Although Brown's dead body is related to countless others, his body is, of course, also unique, as are all murdered bodies. He was and is a person with a name and a life that is cherished and remembered. Each of these murders, despite their connection to racism and antiblackness, is also a separate and individual event. These bodies are torn away from families, friends, and communities, and each has a name. And of course, not all murdered bodies are displayed. Sandra Bland, for one, died in a jail cell, so her body was not in public view. The #SayHerName campaign was part of an effort to recall Bland and countless others whose bodies were killed out of sight but no less violated.

If Brown is a representative of many other dead bodies of color even as he is also only himself, we must think about his death in both general and particular ways. One pair of thinkers, Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, are perhaps especially helpful in thinking about Brown both as a figure for all the dead and as an individual black man (now dead) with his own narrative and position. In particular, they help us think about how even a dead body—in this case, *his* dead body—can have an agency and a power of its own, how it can be both singular and at the same time a body that speaks to and for the countless other bodies murdered by the state and by racist violence.

In looking at the scene of Brown's death and its aftermath, Moten and Harney seek to use that moment to imagine a scene that is completely

different from the one people saw on TV or read about online or in newspapers. They write,

> In the interest of imagining what exists, there is an image of Michael Brown we must refuse in favor of another image we don't have. One is a lie, the other unavailable. If we refuse to show the image of a lonely body, of the outline of the space that body simultaneously took and left, we do so in order to imagine jurisgenerative black social life walking down the middle of the street—for a minute, but only a minute, unpoliced, another city gathers, dancing. We know it's there, and here, and real; we know what we can't have happens all the time.[65]

Moten and Harney are not denying that Brown is lying down dead; rather, they point to the standard way of reading what happened—reading him as victim, as purely passive in the face of a menacing and all-powerful police force—as "a lie" (i.e., a projection, a mythic reading of an act of mythic violence). In thinking about "another image we don't have," they seek to resignify Brown's death, his supine corpse, as belonging to someone who acts from and through an entirely different political order. Perhaps more accurately, they want to allow this other order, something "real" that "happens all the time," to become more legible. In this way, Moten and Harney are demonstrating a desire also expressed by Spillers and Roberts and Hartman, a desire not just to look at the ongoing disaster of white supremacy but to hear the much quieter—but extremely powerful—voices of resistance, survival, and even flourishing amid the state of war against black and brown bodies. They don't "have" this image, but they insist on not just its possibility but its actuality, a fully extant rival for the archist notions of reality we all subscribe to.

To think of "jurisgenerative black social life walking down the middle of the street" (Brown initially drew Officer Darren Wilson's attention by walking down the middle of the street) is to think of a life not condemned but productive, a life that is a life and not merely one marked for death (in the instrumentalist, archist sense).

Speaking further of this other vision of reality, Moten and Harney write, "Michael Brown gives us occasion once again to consider what it is to endure the disaster, to survive (in) genocide, to navigate unmappable differences as a range of localities that, in the end—either all the

65. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, "Michael Brown," in *boundary 2* 42, no. 4 ("Dossier: On Race and Innovation"), 2015: 81.

way to the end or as our ongoing refusal of beginnings and ends—will always refuse to have been taken."[66] In this way, Moten and Harney are engaging in a radical form of marronage of their own wherein the alternative jurisgenerative space that they envision is not just amid the racist white supremacist world, but is actually more real, more true, than that world. The problem is that because our own sense of reality—as Fanon says as well—is based on the "lie" of archism, we are seduced away from those other worlds and realities.

The only way to make this other, more real world legible is through an act of refusal. Rather than accept the endless teleologies of death and necropolitics that seem to be the inevitable fate of African Americans in the United States, Moten and Harney's refusal starts with the most basic apperceptions of reality.

Speaking in terms of this refusal specifically in the case of Michael Brown, Moten and Harney speak of his "endless refusal of standing."[67] This refusal has both a specific bodily referent (Brown is not standing but lying down; he is dead) and a more general secondary sense as refusing "standing"—that is, refusing subjection to whatever recognition or identity the state has to offer the subject of color.

For these authors, the question of standing is paramount. Taken as a term for the recognition of the state, for Moten and Harney, even the most abject subject of the killing state seeks that recognition: "What's most disturbing about Michael Brown (aka Eric Garner, aka Renisha McBride, aka Trayvon Martin, aka Eleanor Bumpurs, aka Emmett Till, aka an endless stream of names and absent names) is our reaction to him, our misunderstanding of him, and the sources of that misunderstanding that manifest and reify a desire for standing, for stasis, within the state war machine which, contrary to popular belief, doesn't confer citizenship upon its subjects at birth but, rather, at death, which is the proper name for entrance into its properly political confines."[68] There is a tendency, even among the most antiracist of subjects, to readily read these murders, and the dead bodies that they produce, through a distorted lens, a "misunderstanding" that reveals a "desire for

66. Ibid., 82.

67. Ibid., 83.

68. Ibid., 84.

standing . . . within the state war machine," a desire to be recognized by the forces of archism (with all the promises such recognition entails). When these dead bodies are read through that desire, what we see is what we are supposed to see: passivity, brokenness, weakness, quiescence. Refusal of this condition constitutes recuperating an entirely different narrative from the exact same postures, the exact same events.

In struggling with these forms of misunderstanding, Moten and Harney go on to specifically reference Brown's seemingly most vulnerable moment, his time as a corpse left on public display on the street: "The prone, exposed, unburied body—the body that is given, in death, its status as body precisely through and by way of the withholding of fleshly ceremony—is what political standing looks like . . . The law of the state is what Ida B. Wells rightly calls lynch law. And we extend it in our appeals to it."[69] Moten and Harney show that in refusing one kind of standing, Brown is taking on another. His dead body "is what political standing looks like." To see Brown as a victim is to fundamentally accept "lynch law," to implicitly accept the state's offer of standing, of its conferring a kind of recognition to Brown even while (but also as a result of) killing him. As noted in chapter 1, to appeal to the state—to call for human rights, respect, and so on—is to play into the hands of archist power. It is to speak in its language and accept the demeaned status—the only kind of status—the state is willing to confer onto this or any other body of color.

By reinterpreting Brown's supine body as "refus[ing] to stand," thus refusing *this* kind of standing, Moten and Harney show that refusal does not always have to look like living defiance, and in fact, sometimes what looks like living defiance can be its own form of subjugation; no act or moment is entirely pure. Refusal is less a question of what is being done (or not done) and more a question of a generalized "no" to the workings of racist biopolitical—and necropolitical—power akin, once again, to Benjamin's general strike (via Sorel), wherein the striker refuses to engage with the state on its own terms (terms on which the state will always ultimately win).[70]

69. Ibid.

70. See Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, ed. Jeremy Jennings (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). See also, once again, Benjamin, "Critique of Violence."

If so, to refuse all forms of state-sanctioned status (to "refus[e] to stand"), the subject of color, even if dead, effectively withdraws the state's very lifeblood, the recognition and acknowledgment of its existence inherent in being a victim of state violence. It's as if state violence is saying, "You try to deny me? By killing you and leaving you out in the open, I'm *making* you acknowledge me; your dead body is a testament to the irresistible power I have over you, my ability to command you to recognize me," to which Moten and Harney (and through their intervention, Brown as well) simply say, "No." It is here that we find the state at its most vulnerable once again because of the asymmetrical nature of recognition. As Althusser tells us, the state *needs* to be recognized by its subjects (perhaps especially by the subjects it oppresses the most) to exist at all. Those subjects, on the other hand, don't need the state. For this reason, refusal of recognition confers a great power on the subject in question.

Rather than appeal to the state this refusal unmakes the state, counterprojecting the unreality and utopianism we normally (and falsely) attribute to other worlds back onto the state itself. Refusing to stand, denying his recognition, rather than becoming nothing himself, Brown can be read as returning the state back to its own nothingness; he gives the state back the death with which it sought to end him.

In this way, if black life matters, so does black death. The black community has a long history of treating funerals as opportunities not simply to mourn but to organize and resist. Emmett Till's funeral—where his family allowed this fourteen-year-old boy's mutilated corpse to be publically displayed after his lynching, causing a major response—is probably the best-known example of turning a violent act against a black body into a form of resistance, turning Emmett Till's death from an instrument of oppression into a form of overcoming. Here the funereal ritual, usually intended to return a body to a safely sanitized image, became instead a means of giving the body back its due; Emmett Till regained his agency in showing what he was, what he had become. Black Lives Matter has taken up this tradition as well, politicizing and radicalizing the funerals of those black people murdered by the state. In doing so, they—like Antigone and the Death Fasters—allow death to inform life, to make the dead something

other than what the state tells them they are, thereby refusing one form of standing in order to (re)gain another.

For Moten and Harney, Brown's death is thus both a crime and an opportunity. The crime is clear, but they refuse to read it as tragic or fated, for this would be, once again, to resort to the language of archism, teleology, and normative forms of (mis)understanding. The opportunity comes from recognizing that the refusal they ascribe to Brown is not just negative, but has a positive aspect as well. They write, "We need to stop worrying so much about how [the state] kills, regulates and accumulates us, and worry more about how we kill, deregulate, and disperse it. We have to love and revere our survival which is (in) our resistance. We have to love our refusal of what has been refused."[71] To "love our refusal" is another way to transition from the "lies" of a phantasmic world created by white supremacy to another, jurisgenerative world. This also strikes me as a very Nietzschean decision on the part of these authors, where yes turns into no and no turns into yes—part of what Nietzsche called *amor fati*, or love of one's fate.[72] Refusal of the lies of archism is at the same time a form of choosing or acceptance. Here *amor fati* means not passive quiescence in the face of progress but its opposite. It means the subject must choose her own present and her own condition—including her mortality and her death (to believe in it). From that position, the trap she finds herself in becomes something else, something that gives her agency rather than taking it away (albeit a very different form of agency than that promised by liberal universalism).

In thinking in these terms, Moten and Harney recognize the real danger of turning Brown, a dead individual, into a fetish of antifetishism—a kind of magical talisman that only creates more phantasm and that

71. Harney and Moten, "Michael Brown," 84.

72. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 37. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon comments on this same idea, writing, "I said in my introduction that man is a *yes*. I will never stop reiterating that. *Yes* to life. *Yes* to love. *Yes* to generosity. But man is also a *no*. *No* to scorn of man. *No* to degradation of man. *No* to exploitation of man. *No* to the butchery of what is most human in man: freedom. Man's behavior is not only reactional. And there is always resentment in a *reaction*. Nietzsche had already pointed that out in *The Will to Power*. To educate man to be *actional*, preserving in all his relations his respect for the basic values that constitute a human world, is the prime task of him, who haven taken thought, prepares to act" (222).

further abstracts entirely from his own life and his own body, thereby falling right back into the archist fetishism that claimed his life in the first place. Moten and Harney write,

> It would be wrong to say that Michael Brown has become, in death, more than himself. He already was that, as he said himself, in echo of so much more than himself. He was already more than that in being less than that, in being the least of these. To reduce Michael Brown to a cypher for our unfulfilled desire to be more than that, for our serially unachieved and constitutionally unachievable citizenship, is to do a kind of counterrevolutionary violence; it is to partake in the ghoulish, vampiric consumption of his body, of the body that became his, though it did not become him, in death, in the reductive stasis to which his flesh was subjected. Michael Brown's flesh is our flesh; he is the flesh of our flesh of flames.[73]

This is why it is critical to remember that even as he stands for so many other murdered black and brown bodies, Michael Brown is also a singular and particular body (like Polynices), irreplaceable and unique. To turn Brown into a pure symbol of resistance would therefore be another way of acceding to the siren calls of biopolitical authority and archist violence (which amount to the same thing). When they write that "[Brown] was already more than [himself] in being less than that," Moten and Harney are asserting that each subject is never just him- or herself; each person is a site upon which the state enacts its power and authority even as it is also the site of Moten and Harney's own forms of refusal that they impute to him. Yet at the same time, if we think purely in these terms, we miss Brown's own agency, his own counterpower as a corpse, and repeat the mistakes of archism by treating his body as a passive surface that serves as a battleground for competing readings of his life and his death (the state's and Moten and Harney's own), turning his "refusal to stand" into something that is not his at all.

That is why it is important to say that in being more than himself, Brown is also less than himself; even as he is this site of battle, he is also just himself, less than the great and inflated sense of his personhood that makes him larger than life. To think that way is to return to Brown himself, to his material body, his life, his name, his particularity.

To think about Brown as a unique person, as a dead body, is to allow his death—his particular and local death, that is—to act back upon the vast

73. Harney and Moten, "Michael Brown," 85.

symbolic warfare that is being committed in his name, to assert his own form of refusal into the mix. If the state and other biopolitical apparatuses seek to thoroughly control and determine "life" (i.e., life as they determine it), then, as Bargu, Mbembe, and Murray argue as well, death itself offers a different kind of life. But death in the abstract is itself too readily drawn into the phantasmic, which is why the state imagines that it "owns" death in some way or at least manages death as best it can. It takes actual, individual deaths such as Brown's to resist the false "life" death is otherwise opposed to. In saying that Brown is "less" than himself, Moten and Harney recognize that reducing someone to his or her material body (and death does exactly that) is disappointing; it seems diminished, less than the kinds of expanded personhoods promised by liberal universalism. But this "less" is also "more," because the expanded self promised to whites and people of color alike, although with radically different outcomes, is itself nonexistent, so on a phantasmic register, a body seems "less" but in reality is "more," because it is tangible—it exists and has something to (un)say.

Imagining a very different reading of Brown's final minutes as well as the aftermath, Moten and Harney write,

> On August 9, like every day, like every other day, black life, in its irreducible sociality, having consented not to be single, got caught walking—with jurisgenerative fecundity—down the middle of the street. Michael Brown and his boys: black life breaking and making laws, against and underneath the state, surrounding it. They had foregone the melancholic appeal to which we now reduce them, for citizenship and subjectivity, and humanness. That they had done so is the source of Darren Wilson's genocidal instrumentalization in the state's defense. They were in a state of war and they knew it. Moreover, they were warriors in insurgent, if imperfect, beauty. What's left for us to consider is the difference between the way of Michael Brown's dance, his fall and rise—the way they refuse to take place when he takes to the streets, the way Ferguson takes to the streets—and to the way we seek to take but don't seem to take to the streets: in protest, as mere petitioners, fruitlessly seeking energy in the pitiful, minimal, temporary shutdown of this or that freeway . . . What would it be and what would it mean for us jurisgeneratively to take the streets, to live in the streets, to gather together another city right here, right now?[74]

Turning Brown from a pure victim into a "warrior" who was "in a state of war and . . . knew it" completes the rereading and re-envisioning that

74. Ibid., 85–86.

Moten and Harney engage in; it allows his death to inform—and perhaps even transform—his life as well as the lives of other people of color and the living in general, to transform his death from something that was not his at all into something he can claim and can speak for and from.[75] The warriors Moten and Harney describe are seeking not "a beautiful death," an archist phantasm that is based on the instrumentalization of life and death alike, but rather a beautiful life, a jurisgenerative form of existence (akin to Roberts's discussion of sociogenesis) that unites the living and the dead in one community of what could be called outlaws—not in the negative sense but in the positive sense of being outside of one kind of law and thus available for another.[76]

For all this, in considering Moten and Harney's rereading of Brown's death and the spectacle of his unburied, murdered body, it might seem that they offer nothing but solace. After all, reinterpreting Brown as "refusing to stand" or as a warrior does not, in and of itself, change what happened. Brown is still dead; his murderer still got off scot-free. It does not bring him back to his family or to his friends. The fact that his death and the subsequent protests of his killing helped give momentum to Black Lives Matter is, of course, of huge importance, but how do Moten and Harney's words add to or subtract from that situation?

Here again I would argue that although their intervention seems to lie purely at the level of the symbolic, the symbolic is critical when it comes to challenging both state and biopolitical authority. If those forms of authority actually had the ontological status they seek and claim to have, then it would indeed be pointless to try to reframe or reimagine Brown's subject position as an unburied body. One would be facing the solidity of a phenomenon that could not be denied or undermined. But because these forms of power are so ephemeral, so vulnerable, because the state and other biopolitical actors (like the white mob in "Going to Meet the

75. Seeking to give Brown back his own voice, Moten and Harney quote a Facebook post he made a few days before being murdered where he said, "If i leave this earth today atleast youll know i care about others more than i cared about my damn self" (ibid.). Their response is to imagine his voice from beyond the grave, saying, "Go on call me 'demon' but I WILL love my *damn self*" (ibid., 84). This is an allusion to the fact that Darren Wilson in his testimony spoke of Michael Brown as looking like a "demon." These two statements also serve as epigraphs to this book.

76. I am indebted to Sam Frost for suggesting the idea of the "outlaw."

Man") *need* these bodies to mean something particular, the symbolic becomes a vital and critical place in which to engage in semiotic warfare.

Accordingly, Brown is indeed a warrior; he is fighting, refusing, and undoing the phantasms that led to his death. He is an agent, and a powerful one at that—look at all the actions that have happened in his name! In this way too, Brown is not simply an instrument for Moten and Harney's own purposes; I once again argue that they are instead allowing him to deinstrumentalize them, altering the concepts of life and death, permitting other forms of life and politics to become visible in the process. Even as a dead person—perhaps especially as a dead person—Brown is *doing something*. He is unmaking the web of seemingly inevitable truisms that forms the lifeblood of the state and biopolitics more generally, rendering it radically incredible and revealing archism's lies as literally utopian ("nowhere"), while the resistance to those lies is all too tangible—present in Brown's own dead, unburied body.

In this way, Brown's counterprojective power affects not only Moten and Harney but many others as well, including members of his family. Like Antigone for her brother, Brown's family is also able to speak for and to his death. Brown's mother, Lesley McSpadden; his father, Michael Brown Sr.; and other members of his family have vocally spoken out and challenged police narratives.

And many other wives, husbands, partners, parents, siblings, and other relations, as well as friends and comrades, have spoken out about this and other killings as well. We see this once again in the #SayHerName campaign for Bland; we see this in the agitation on behalf of Philando Castile, initiated by his girlfriend, Diamond Reynolds, who was in the car with Castile and her four-year-old daughter. Reynolds recorded part of the incident that led to Castile's death and put it on social media. More recently, Myeisha Johnson, wife of U.S. Army Sergeant La David Johnson, challenged President Trump's narrative of when he made a bungled and disrespectful condolence call to her about her slain husband in which he did not even know (or say) his name. Although Johnson's death in Niger does not follow the same pattern of state-sanctioned killing we see in Brown's case, it remains true that his death comes into a racist and archist framework, and the voice of his grieving widow has been silenced—or at least attempted

to be silenced—as so many grieving and angry family members have been in the past.

These kinds of exchanges can be read once again through the lens of rights and victimhood, resubmitting the dead and their families to an archist and biopolitical discourse. (Brown's family, for example, was awarded 1.5 million dollars in a civil suit for wrongful death.) Yet there is another way to think about these narratives: as voices that have been energized not only by anger and grief but also by an alternative source of power and authority that is also present, albeit usually eclipsed by normative narratives that seek to return everything to archist explanations and understandings. These counterpowers are always present, but it takes an act of refusal to bring them to the fore. Such a refusal turns what is otherwise just business as usual (grieving, raging, suing) into the source of a much more radical—and, I would add, anarchist—response, a way to earn a death that is also a way to make a life.

And this goes back to Michael Brown as well. Even as Moten and Harney try to give Brown back his own voice (i.e., project onto him what his voice might be), I argue that they are also, in effect, listening to that inaudible voice he himself already has as a member of the dead. If they are speaking for him, he is also speaking (or unspeaking) to them (and thereby to everyone else as well). It is this subtler dimension of engagement that I argue is not purely symbolic (or at least not symbolic in the way that term is usually understood) and that has the power to transform a semiotic struggle into an actual and political one. This transformation will be the subject of the final chapter.

Conclusion
The Authority of the Dead

In this book, I've spoken a lot about the power and even the agency of the dead. I want to qualify that by saying this: I don't think the dead are actually agents in the way we normally understand that term; they are dead, after all (and this is not a book about zombies, angels, or other forms of an animated afterlife). Even so, I have been arguing that the dead exert a kind of counteragency that can feel agentic to those of us who remain alive simply because agency is how we experience affect in all its complex dimensions; it is the coin of our realm. In order to understand the kinds of counteragency I'm describing, I'd like to finish this book by reflecting on the source of this counteragency, and revisit as well the idea of allowing even the socially dead (if that theory is convincing) to have a voice—and a life—by thinking about how the dead themselves can contribute to such voices even as they have no actual voices of their own. In so doing, I would like return to what Stuart Murray calls *thanatopolitics* and what Mbembe and Bargu call *necropolitics* through Benjamin's concept of the dead's "authority" and ask, What kind of authority can we attribute to the dead, and how does it manifest not only in symbolic terms (although, once again, this is critical) but also in actual, manifest, and political terms?

To best understand such questions, I will briefly turn back to Benjamin's work in order to think about how he conceives of material objects (including our own bodies) and the way they inherently resist projection. Understanding this helps us think more clearly about what a dead body "does" to the projections we place upon all bodies (and all things). In order to best describe this idea in Benjamin's work and, in particular, to get to his concept of the "authority" of the dead, it

is necessary to examine some of his political theology insofar as, for Benjamin, the phenomenon of archism—and thus the way to resist it as well—is explicitly theological in its origin (keeping in mind that archism is not a term that Benjamin uses).

In "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," Benjamin describes the break between human beings and objects, which he dates back to the fall of Adam (and Eve, although she isn't really the subject of his telling). Benjamin tells us that in paradise, Adam's job was to give a spoken name to the objects he found before him in the garden. This was no small task. Benjamin writes, "God's creation is completed when things receive their names from man, from whom in name language alone speaks."[1]

For Benjamin, material objects have a language of their own. Their language isn't of the same sort as human language and doesn't take place in the same medium (i.e., it has no relationship to sound or speech). Benjamin writes, "Things are denied the pure formal principle of language—namely, sound. They can communicate to one another only through a more or less material community. This community is immediate and infinite, like every linguistic communication; it is magical (for there is also a magic of matter)."[2] In this way, there is a "language" of things (though Benjamin would probably not even put that term in quotation marks), but it is a silent, magical language. Only humans have the ability (so he says) to express the nature of things via a series of sounds that give voice to the silent names that objects already possess and already communicate to one another. Benjamin goes on to write that "the incomparable feature of human language is that its magical community with things is immaterial and purely mental, and the symbol of this is sound."[3]

With the fall, the direct connection between human beings and material objects was decisively severed: "The paradisiacal language of man must have been one of perfect knowledge, whereas later all knowledge

1. Walter Benjamin, "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, vol. 1, *1913–1926* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 65.

2. Ibid., 67.

3. Ibid.

is again infinitely differentiated in the multiplicity of language, was indeed forced to differentiate itself on a lower level as creation in name."[4] Thus the fall's effect was to radically separate human beings from the material world around them. Language itself, the thing that once connected us to objects, becomes a barrier, a babel of terms whose fracturing represents the way the world itself becomes fractured and broken into pieces after the fall (for humans, anyway). Benjamin also posits that "the knowledge to which the snake seduces, that of good and evil, is nameless. It is vain in the deepest sense, and this very knowledge is itself the only evil known to the paradisiacal state. Knowledge of good and evil abandons name; it is a knowledge from outside, the uncreated imitation of the created world."[5] In other words, humans must henceforth resort to "uncreated imitation of the created world," an attempt to reproduce the unity language once gave us. We can only project and pretend; we no longer have access to the true world.

As such, we are highly susceptible—I would even say required—to engage in fetishism and idolatry, forced to make false equivalencies in order to try to find our way back to paradise, even though that will never happen. Due to the lack of a basic ontological connection to the real world, our projections become more and more monstrous, leading to the preconditions for archism—that is, states, racism, and biopolitics, and necropolitics as well.[6]

As for material objects in a postlapsarian world, they continue to emit "the magic of matter" among themselves, but they also are in a state of mourning (he calls it a "deep sadness") for the loss of their spoken name and the communication with human beings it afforded.[7] The world's objects are in mourning, but for Benjamin, they are also in rebellion; they rebel against the false names and fetishistic projections—and especially commodity fetishism—to which we subject them. This

4. Ibid., 71.

5. Ibid.

6. At the same time, I don't think any of this was inevitable. To really embrace the radical contingency of time (i.e., to engage with time from an anarchist perspective) is to refuse any attempt to say that something could only have been the way that it occurred. It is to say that we are not doomed to idolatry and archism, that things could have been, and still could be, otherwise.

7. Ibid., 72.

occurs even at the level of language itself, which after all has its own material existence in terms of sounds and letters. Thus, for example, speaking in his *Origin of German Tragic Drama* of the way the Baroque *trauerspiel* (the mourning plays) subverted the playwrights' own desire to project a sense of sovereignty and the authority of kings, Benjamin writes that "the language of the baroque is constantly convulsed by rebellion on the part of the elements which make it up."[8]

This contentious relationship between human beings and material objects applies not only to our relationship to the world in general but also to our own bodies, which are also material objects and, like all such objects, similarly resist the false truths we would put onto them. In Benjamin's schema, as already noted, when we die our bodies revert more readily to their own objecthood. Perhaps more accurately, the fact that our bodies have never been "ours" and have never been the subjects we interpellate them to be becomes more visible when our bodies cease to serve as active and naturalized vessels for our identities and subjectivities. And as our dead bodies decay, the very repulsive features of that process make our own materiality more apparent and the power of phantasm and projection that much more subverted and displaced.

In light of this exercise in thinking about the theology of objects, the question of what our bodies tell us may be the wrong question to ask. We don't need to hear what our bodies have to say (actually, the whole point is that they don't say anything and never did) as much as we need to hear what they have to *unsay*, or untell—that is, the way they interfere with what passes for our voice, our identity, what we "really are" and want.

In "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," Benjamin speaks of an "other muteness" that affects all material objects after the fall (with human bodies being no exception, despite the fact that we can "speak").[9] This very muteness may, under conditions of fetishism and sovereign projections, become an asset, a form of resistance to archism in all its varieties. The world's objects, it could be said, and especially our own bodies, might teach us how *not to speak*, how silence—or more accurately, the practice of "material community"—is

8. Walter Benjamin, *Origin of German Tragic Drama* (New York: Verso, 1998), 207.

9. Benjamin, "On Language as Such," 72.

an answer to projection and how the silence of the corpse, in particular, can unmake and untell the frenzy of fetishistic language we otherwise ceaselessly cast outward.

But how can untelling and unmaking yet constitute a kind of positive—that is, an "agentic"—contribution? How are such negating acts themselves creative and generative (in the same sense that Neil Roberts speaks of sociogenesis)?[10] In his short essay "The Storyteller," Benjamin may offer some help with how to think about that possibility and, in particular, the active and political role the dead play in the lives of the living. In considering the experience and effect of death, Benjamin observes that "just as a sequence of images is set in motion inside a man as his life comes to an end—unfolding the views of himself under which he has encountered himself without being aware of it—suddenly in his expressions and looks the unforgettable emerges, and imparts to everything that concerned him that authority which even the poorest wretch in the act of dying possesses for the living around him. This authority is at the very source of the story."[11]

Speaking of the dying and then the dead's "authority" suggests, perhaps most clearly of all, the way the dead have an effect of their own on the living, a power not equivalent to the kinds we wield and are subjected to while we are alive (although, as already noted, the living too participate in this kind of power; they too exist in material community with one another). This power may be entirely negative in its effects (untelling, unmaking), but it remains active, a form of "authority"—or really, counterauthority—nonetheless.

Benjamin follows this discussion of the authority of the dead with an analysis of a short story by Johann Peter Hebel called "Unexpected Reunion." In that story, a young miner is betrothed to a young woman but dies in the mines on the eve of their wedding. His fiancée never gets married to anyone else, and over the long course of time, she becomes an old woman. One day, the young man's body is discovered and brought up to the surface. Certain metals in the mine preserve his

10. Neil Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 119.

11. Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, vol. 3, *1935–1938* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 151. I am grateful to Zachary Reyna for his bringing my attention to this passage in "The Storyteller."

corpse so that he looks exactly as he did on the couple's wedding eve. Reunited with her fiancé, the bride herself dies soon afterward. Of this, Benjamin writes,

> When Hebel, in the course of this story, was confronted with the necessity of making a long period of years graphic, he did so in the following sentences. "In the meantime, the city of Lisbon was destroyed by an earthquake, and the Seven Years' War came and went, and Emperor Francis I died, and the Jesuit Order was abolished, and Poland was partitioned, and Empress Maria Theresa died, and Struensee was executed. America became independent, and the united French and Spanish forces were unable to capture Gibraltar. The Turks locked up General Stein in the Veteraner Cave in Hungary, and Emperor Joseph died. King Gustavus of Sweden conquered Russian Finland, and the French Revolution and the long war began, and Emperor Leopold II went to his grave too. Napoleon captured Prussia, and the English bombarded Copenhagen, and the peasants sowed and harvested. The millers ground, the smiths hammered, and the miners dug for veins of ore in their underground workshops."[12]

In response, Benjamin writes, "Never has a storyteller embedded his report deeper in natural history than Hebel manages to do in this chronology. Read it carefully. Death appears in it with the same regularity as the Reaper does in the processions that pass around the cathedral clock at noon."[13]

In other words, this passage of time—that is to say, a period of lived human experience—is rendered tangible by the fact that it is frequently and regularly punctuated by moments of death (rendering it "natural history"). Even if death is an "ending," it is also creating and shaping human experience and, in particular, human time. The "authority of the dead" seems here to be a reference to the material element of this history, the way that death serves as a limit on human phantasms of efficacy and immortality—that is, on archism—offering a humbler and all-too-human response as a result. For Benjamin, these few lines by Hebel epitomize the dying art of storytelling (he says it is dying, in part, because we are increasingly separated from actual moments of death in modern life). The regular and repetitive arrival of death, for emperors and peasants alike, is what makes the passage of time comprehensible to us (and also defies the mythic hierarchies, two

12. Ibid., 152.

13. Ibid.

bodies or not, that human beings invent and impose on themselves). If not measured against the moments of death, time would have a fantastical, unreal quality, precisely the quality that archism seeks to import to time via ideas like progress and other teleological concepts. One of the overriding themes of "The Storyteller" is that stories are somehow more real than novels (which have largely come to replace them and which are isolated and plucked from out of the social and material realms) exactly because of their intimate and ongoing connection with death.

At first glance, the "protagonist" of the story, the young miner who remains unburied but freshly preserved for many decades, appears to be freed from exactly that which makes death a kind of rival authority to the state and biopolitical apparatuses. He doesn't rot away; he remains magically unchanged (shades here too of "The Hunter Gracchus"). But fresh and preserved as he may be, the miner's body does not cease to project what dead bodies always project: the limitations and unmakings of phantasm, which allow for life to be experienced as such not in a "true" way but in a way that is maximally freed from phantasmic distortion—that is, that for all that he is preserved, the miner does not cease to emit the authority of the dead. His bride, it could be said, remained "true" to him because he was not entirely gone; she remained in the wake of his authority. She waited patiently until his body was rediscovered and soon after joined him in death.

From the perspective of the living, the authority of the dead always exists and always occurs even amid other archist forms of authority (sovereignty, biopolitics, etc.). This authority serves as a constant font of resistance to these other forms. If we think of the dead's authority as a kind of power in its own right, even if it is a power that only unsays things and takes things away from us, we see more clearly how death and dead bodies, in particular, are themselves engaging in a silent form of communication, rivaling the forces of what Benjamin calls "information" and other bases of archist symbolic authority.[14]

We can also continue this conversation about the authority of the dead and the way that they can affect the living by returning to Spiller's desire to have the black subject speak for herself. Normally, a great

14. Ibid., 147.

deal of interference gets in the way of such speaking. A tremendous amount of desire and confusion and a seeking of "standing" (to cite Moten and Harney) overwrites the black subject's voice. Once again, to allow the dead to "speak" to the living performs the service of not so much giving us insight into a "true voice" as simply disrupting and quieting those other, overriding voices in order to allow still-living bodies to be *untold* and *unsaid* and, in the silence (that "other muteness") that follows, to listen to what those voices, usually silent or shouted over, might "say." In other words, here, too, the dead's authority can be brought to bear to challenge other (and, I would argue, illicit) authorities that seek to speak for the living. In that way, the other life being led by black subjects (actually, by all subjects, although in ways that are more or less buried)—a life that is generally not noticed because it is being shouted over by the frenzy of archist phantasm—becomes legible and audible to those who are living it.

In *Scenes of Subjection*, Saidiya Hartman writes along similar lines:

> The intervention made here [i.e., in her book] is an attempt to recast the past, guided by conundrums and compulsions of our contemporary crisis: the hope for social transformation in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. The quixotic search for a subject capable of world-historical action, and the despair induced by the lack of one. In this regard, it is hoped that the instances of insurgency and contestation narrated herein and the relentless proliferation of small acts of resistance perhaps offer some small measure of encouragement and serve to remind us that the failures of Reconstruction still haunt us, which in part explains why the grand narratives continue to hold sway over our imagination. . . . As Walter Benjamin remarked, "Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe if the enemy wins."[15]

Here too Hartman seeks to recuperate a life being lived under the auspices of the false "life" that archism produces and demands. In service to this goal, Hartman takes from Benjamin the idea that the past is not as past as we think, that the dead too have something to gain from contemporary efforts to defeat archism and racism and antiblackness. In this way, we can see that the relationship between the living and the dead—and perhaps, in particular, the unburied dead—can be mutually beneficial. The

15. Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 14.

dead can teach the living—and, particularly in this case, the living people of color—not to listen to the voices that tend to be read as inevitable, authoritative, and the only path to redemption. Even more forcefully, by countering the authority of the state and other biopolitical agents with their own authority, the dead can defeat those voices; they can untell the living, allowing other voices to be heard. And the living, as Hartman implies, can do something for the dead as well: the living can take the dead's "refusal of standing" (i.e., to conform to what they are told to be and do, with "standing" understood both as a bodily posture and as a form of the state's recognition and determination) and use it to recuperate themselves as living versions of that resistance (what they also are while they are living the false life of archism). Just as Moten and Harney reread Michael Brown's act of walking down the middle of the street as being the act of a warrior "who [knows] it" and his lying down dead as refusing standing, it becomes possible to read living bodies as having an entirely different form of agency, a different status borne of their resistance to the very forces that otherwise seem (and seek) to entirely determine them.

And it is here that the anarchist possibilities of resistance based on the authority of the dead become clearer. I would say that the dead's authority is an anarchist authority, one that stands in direct opposition to all forms of archism, all hierarchical, phantasmic, racist, and projected elements that are inherently violent because (as Benjamin tells us) they are fundamentally mythic. This form of authority accepts material community, accepts that what the dead have to (not) say is anarchist precisely because it is antiprojective, because it does not share in the existential anxiety that constantly moves and directs sovereignty and biopolitics in endlessly destructive, racist, and deeply violent directions.

Similarly, I think the life recuperated from under the shadow of the faux life that archism promises but never delivers—a life in which, to cite James Baldwin, we "earn," and believe in, our own death—is an anarchist life. The practices I have been describing in this book—seeking noninstrumentalization and antiprojection, refusal, engaging with materiality, letting life be affected by death and letting the dead convey their authority—are all, in my view, anarchist practices insofar as archism is, above all, a refusal and fear of death, a desire

to dominate it (and dish it out to others). Because death appears to rob us of something, all states and other biopolitical actors are afraid of it; it appears to be too close to the nothingness the state knows itself to be (for all its frantic denial). Above all, archist agents are afraid of their own deaths—the death of the state (two bodies notwithstanding), of governmental systems, of racist communities. They see death as an absolute limit, and this limit is what they cannot accept. And in seeking to control death, they also seek to control everything else as well, especially life itself (hence biopolitics); an endless horizon of racism, domination, appropriation, and killing is the result.

Anarchism, at least the way I have been considering it in this book, fundamentally accepts death in the sense that it does not seek to dominate or control it. When guided by the authority of the dead, anarchism has the wherewithal to avoid, undermine, and abolish other, archist forms of authority. Because death becomes not a limit but rather a coconspirator—a fellow outlaw—it serves as an endless source of resistance. The kind of revolutionary responses that Moten and Harney imagine when thinking about the unburied body of Michael Brown become not just dreams and wishes but real possibilities, viable and revolutionary alternatives. I posit that anarchism as a practice can and will succeed if and only if it remains under the authority of the dead. To fall into the trap of denying death and seeing it as an absolute limit rather than as part of a continuum of material bodies from those who are living to those who are not is to reassert that archist desire to control, dominate, and destroy life; this is, for Benjamin, the ultimate response to the fall, and as I see it, only anarchism has an answer to how to continue to live in the face of death without succumbing to utter and complete fetishism and mythic violence.

As I said in the introduction, this is meant to be a book about life rather than death. My focus is on ways of living that are informed by death but not ultimately about death per se. Death only serves to unmake and break up the false life we are told is our only possible life; it allows us to expose our actual life—a limited, fleshy life that we might not want to choose but is in fact the only life that we have. But if we do recover this life, it is undetermined and entirely up to the living.

I would say that it is free, not once and for all, but for as long as we remain under the (counter)authority of the dead.

If it is possible to learn—or unlearn—from the dead (and to have the dead, in turn, learn/unlearn from the living), then the seemingly endless cycle of projection, violence, and resistance need not be the only fate available to the living. There may well be other narratives to tell, other identities to be, other voices to speak. If archism has nothing but "life" (as it determines it) to offer its subjects and nothing but death to deal out to the other (in order to give itself its own life), then through the anarchist struggle against such false choices, alternative forms of life and new forms of death remain to be discovered, produced, and engaged with—even as existing forms remain to be recovered from beneath the shadow of archist projection. The dead never will and never can abandon the living, and in turn, we, the living, can and should learn to stop abandoning the dead.