BIGLY MISTWEATED:
ON CIVIC GRIEVANCE

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1. The Trumpian Incursion

So. Let me rewind, pull this together. Maybe I’m coming out of it, ready to rumble, unsticking from a uniformly frozen pose, my brand of Medusoid petrification. I go in and out of these alternating states of inertia and hopped up mobility, locked and loaded. Whatever. I am a fucking mess. Or rather, I am a reflector of a mess, transmitting in a desert of despair. The elections threw us an existential curve ball. How resolutely we lost—yet, to whom, to what? The scope of the loss that must be borne—massive, embarrassing, harbinger of body harm—pitches one into a catatonic stall whose shelf-life and stealth articulations, somatic jostles, disturbed sleep patterns, lost trust, rage outbreaks, unconscious scrapes, decisive breakups, social suspicion, cannot be fully predicted. Under such circumstances, it is not clear how to maintain the protest engine set in gear, how to make it viable and sustainable, something “we can believe in.” The election of a team super-charged by masculinist pathologies jolted us as a protest in its own right—in terms of Nietzschean evaluation, as the bad and decadent side of the very notion of protest. Trump is the sign of a protest gone bad, very bad, tremendously bad. Folks, it’s very, very bad. The campaign wore the mask of a life-affirming imposition, laced with destructive jouissance, while holding steady on first chakra intensities that boost familial, tribal, nation-hugging appropriations, strong but pitched very low, very, very low. When they went low, we were nearly ko’d.

As for me, I await instructions from the community of warrior-agitators, Micah White and other highly articulate activists on the ground in order to see how to move up against the impossible. I would be listening to music to get pumped, to Common, to Cranfield and Slade, to Beethoven and so many other fist-raisers across the charts of musical lament. But, in this instance, I can’t. A mourning period has kept me away from music so my head fills with static bombs instead. So much holds me from returning the punches in the throttled stagnation of disappointment. I sit in anticipatory bereavement of the next years, trying to rouse, looking for energy surges and the stores of public
language that let me fuse with other citizens of rage. But like a schizo sprung from Deleuze’s pages, I am running, for the most part, to the count of stationary mobility. I guess that’s OK, if you’re just a tracker of minoritized traces, I mean, a writer. . .

**It’s das Man’s world.** January 20, noted indelibly by the great poet, Paul Celan, ended our ability to tell time. It was a catastrophic date. According to the poet, the unique date haunts our relation to temporality and marks the stoppage of history. Time ceased on January 20, a marker of the shadow of time, announcing the vanishing of Enlightenment buoys that carry historically prized notions on which discerning folks tend to count and existentially float—in good or bad times, in the warp of time, even when one is out of time or in the tunnel of untimeliness, one straps oneself to notions pumped by a touch of transcendence such as “progress,” “perfectibility,” “the end of prejudice,” “human dignity,” “the relinquishment of superstitious,” and so forth. Celan’s date announces and voids these hopeful levers; as in Blanchot’s essay, “The Indestructible,” the poet’s language states that something has happened on the order of the human capacity to destroy, revealing to us man’s delivery to his own destruction, completing a run of unstoppable impairment.

On this date—the hollow of which returns every year to hit us in some unconscious place of troubled receptivity—on this date, in 1942, senior Nazi officials and SS officers were convened at Wannsee, a suburb of Berlin, to engineer “The Final Solution to the Jewish Question.” Celan’s taut reflections on January 20 prompted Derrida to think about signature and date, what it means to sign off with a date, even one that stalls any advance, including the simplest return of a given date, in terms of calendrical time. The term, a termination, is pencilled in every year again, reappearing faintly as a permanent lesion that cannot be removed from the remotest horizon of historical becoming. Even the notion of “horizon,” as basis and background—as supporting field and limit, hermeneutically set—was shattered. January 20: a date to end all dates, the final date, charged with finality, determining the phantasm and implementation of the depraved idea of a final solution, the destruction of a neighbour, the friend, a civic alterity.

The German-American Donald Trump does not measure up to the unprecedented insolence, the event that decided Jewish extermination. Yet, something pernicious keeps returning, and civic prohibitions, after so much

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1 Vibing off the popular slogan, “it’s a man’s world,” I refer here to Heidegger’s consideration of what he calls in *Being and Time* “das Man,” usually translated as “the They,” an inauthentic morph of man. But you should read the pertinent passages closely to get the full gist of the import and vapidity of “das Man.”
reparative straitening, have been lifted. The unsayables are mouthed by the obscene broadcast system named, “Trump”—a name that Thomas Mann, or Flaubert before him, would write into a narrative that seeks to capture mediocrity and a promiscuous capacity for unrelenting wreckage. How did this come about on our watch, at the time allotted for inhabiting this earth, attended by a particular stopwatch checking being and nihilism, when fundamental values are upended? To the degree that we are still related to the possibility of advent, counting in our largely hapless ways on the future, marked inwardly by dates that recur or continue to disturb and cease historical humming, the revenant and breach of the time, the date January 20, must be accounted for. The obsession with a date’s return is not a flex of science fiction, but part of a congruency that bears reflection, calls up ethical responsiveness and a sense of haunted time, already written up, on the rebound and off the rails. At once unprecedented in terms of arrogance of office and overreach, the era of Trump also brandishes a series of regressive collapses, backsliding to racist grammars, reigning, in terms of sanctioned public discourse, the nearly snuffed out inflammation of white supremacist mania, misogynist blowback, Christian jihadist spew, and archaic bordering systems. Infantile modes of aggression motor the polluters of the good breast, to speak with Melanie Klein’s analysis of the greedy predator.

Since Kafka made it a point to open the gates of our penitentiary culture—always near and intrusive, if underground or relocated to a border island, unconsciously encroaching—our bodies have been seen as exposed to retaliatory write-ups, strapped into historical writing machines that stamp and date us, leaking historical inscription. January 20: the date and what it stands for may seem remote, yet figures of Nazism keep returning, as if on automatic replay, citing the traumatism of an historical repetition compulsion. As distant as the imaginary field of reception must seem at times, its tireless reach is awesome, spills into the way we move or stagger through darkened fields of political comprehension.

**Calling our teachers.** Events turning on time still hit you in the gut and make your immune system give way, not only because of this or that decimating decree or violent dispatch. Nietzsche, first philosopher to put his body on the line, warned against the way political events and recurring destructions would disturb your organs, making you want to puke. Retching and shuttered down by migraines, Friedrich Nietzsche has also taught us to dance, to take measure and calibrate steps as we engage the necessity, when something hits home, of Dis-Tanz, dance of distance. When darkness threatens to drown out my ability to push back, throw that punch, shout out in fist-shaking fury, I remember the way Nietzsche has filled my dance card, sometimes taking me for
a solitary spin; other times, by opening and inventing a new lexicon of rage, the last philosopher, as he was called, scripted a world-class swirl around futural sites of calamity. In the darkest night, Nietzsche threw himself into the rhythm and possibilities of music and its ecstatic flare. Nietzsche, graduate of Bayreuth, knows all about Woodstock nation and the spirit of music to get us on up. I wonder, my friends (I understand the temptation to sit this out, to freeze in stupefied ignominy, even when we send holograms out to the streets of protest, nonetheless): Can I still have this dance, ask you to unclench sufficiently, or just a little bit, so that language can happen upon us and thought tuned to our mournful disordering of sense? (This is not the place, but when he goes wild on us and Dionysian, throwing up in the Nietzschean vocabulary is a good thing—not only part of the heave of cleansing but also a way to reverse dialectics. But this is another story. Or is it? Can Hegel and analytic philosophers dance their way out of the knob of history?)

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To the White House (Sorry, Virginia Woolf!). Given the grave appointment of moment—it was in the cards to collate January 20—the report of his actions remains taped to the dates of calamity checked off by Celan and Derrida. On Holocaust Remembrance Day, which falls a week after January 20 (though Werner Hamacher has argued that there is no “after” the Holocaust, time has stilled in an unreadable frozen pose)—a week later, according to ontic calendars (materially indifferent, mechanically turning around the blighted sun), the successful miscreant, whose narcissism demands of him a turnout of crass acts of power, issues a decree to shut out Muslims of seven nation-states. Severing the Abrahamic brother, world takes a hit and opens to the fallout of the unbound. In more Arendtian terms, he has cut into existence, developing repressive disavowals of world-binding relations. Even though time has stopped, though something keeps ticking, its shadow progression nonetheless offers dates to check off. There is something like a January 21 that lines up, presenting itself, though without matching the mood with triumphal bragging rights or the fantasy of overcoming the wounding pinch of the precedent date. There is little hope for moving beyond what Celan and Derrida signed off as “January 20.” But this is what we’ve got, this is what I’ll take, with the understanding that January 20 and 21 are evermore toggled together, if for a flash or lurch forward. January 21 limps along, wanting to make time return along an axis of viability. A surge, a remembrance of uprising and the power punch of protest, still pulsing without certitude of outcome, still straining despite the strong turnouts, January 21, 2017, delivered a response to the
dispiriting call relayed from January 20 on our shared timetable of wounded acknowledgement.

For a moment, there was a January 21.

Nearly unexpected, cued up by the call of a newly keyed rhetoric of destruction, a licenced throwdown of hatred, a 21 January turned up the sound system of Echo to drown out, if only momentarily, a damaged national Narcissus. However minoritized Echo may be in myth and subsidiary narratives that surround her, she, in the end, may just have the upper hand, the righteous stance of a first-responder that knows no gag order. In terms of adding a date to the time-suspension of 20 January, a different relation may start to rouse in terms of harm done in and by time, a harm that remains irreversible. The second and secondary appointment may not overtake the destructive propensities of January 20, but maybe it shifts grounds enough for something different to rise up, if not the fresh, new sun. The toggled date, January 21, does not cancel out the injurious date that it must somehow succeed, but tends to its wounds.

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A grieving citizenry and the anxiety of non-address. Let us move to the second day, if we can push on the sense of that week, according to a nonlinear flight-plan, knowing that the 20th of January will not budge. The 2017 Women’s March—massive, elegant, to the point—invites us to look into the nature of protest, the way we file by sites of inequity or are filed down by disturbing flare-outs of injustice. My focus in recent work is on civic grievances. How do we understand the form of address constituted by complaint or the grievances we file? The march of January 21, at once exalted and dispiriting—we hit a wall, it wasn’t Mexico—made every one of us level with the way civic grievances are bound to be diverted by those addressed. Sometimes messages may arrive, but we have no mastery over their itineraries. Missiles and missives can be disarmed at any point of their trajectory. Yes: sometimes, something arrives, though, and lands off programmed routes. Laced with grief, profiling the solemnity of a grieving citizenry, the Women’s March of January 21, was strengthened by its very sense of deflation and the anxiety of non-address. We were in a swirl of Mitsein, bulked up by a momentary epiphany of collective determination. But we also held to the abyssal sense of indeterminacy, making points that will not stick with those wielding executive power. Our contestatory field was not level, was on the side of decimated being, glacial sobriety. Am I exaggerating—or, as my students might say, “over-exaggerating” my point? I’m not sure that I am, given the proto-fascist
cut of destiny that I’m looking at. The language was spare on January 21. On the downside of exuberance, posters were homemade and fabulously quirky. We were set on a kind of Bataillean march: forming a community without communion, we remained unconvinced of our substantiality, yet moved by a kind of resolve, a nearly Heideggerian Ent-schlossenheit. The tightening of resolve came down on the other side of Heidegger, the one granted by Reiner Schürmann, astonishing philosopher who succumbed to AIDS, capable of drawing the work into its anarchic freedom zones, turning it against the murky intentionalities of its signatory. Resolve contains the capacity for exposure. It also sheds light on the response for which a terrifying disclosure calls. Tensed by civic disappointment, alert to the gravity of the call to responsibility, a crowd of duty-bound responders went out on the streets, showing up in the face of loss. As oddball as this may seem in our day of urgent political collapse, an overall grasp of Derridian codes of delivery alongside the concern this philosopher articulated with misdirected missives will help orient our sense of “destinerring” intelligence, a system of envoys left unprotected by any reliable logic of cognition or recognizable political system.

Let me bring back my friend, Werner Hamacher, Germany’s contemporary version of Hegel. Werner warns that protest as form and tactical manoeuvre may not suffice in the face of this calamity; we must look to something which functions like ostracization in the Athenian polis. Donald Trump and his destructive horde must be ostracized, with violent precision and unrelenting determination.

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**At the intersection of twitterature & shiterature.** As a wave of action that starts us off, protest must be analyzed, understood, considered in terms of its deficiencies, without overlooking the proud, if brutal, history of breakout syntax of civic responsibility. We were told at the time that the bombs stopped flying, napalm had ceased cratering the earth, when protest surged during the Vietnam era under the slogan, “The whole world is watching!” Philosophically inflected and pragmatically tuned, the scope of protest, its ability to affect change or blow the whistle, its capacity ethically to produce a necessary halt, becomes a matter of calculating what our time can tolerate, absorb or feed on, the responsiveness that protest presupposes or abandons. Some protests have nowhere to go but a dead letter office. Other flexes of protest muscle appear to meet a target, make things take measure, die down where necessary, or expose their repressive brutality in ways that end a certain run of aggressive indecency. At this point in our history, a series of reflections and interventions must ask the tough questions without deflating a sense of the power punch that a protest
nation must deliver. Protest, an appetite of civic grief that must be increased, if continually modified, requires us to assume the posture of hyperethicity, even when we sense and fear the pump up of resistance to be somehow faltering, crashing against a wall of reduced expectation. Sometimes it works. Sometimes, we are outplayed and undermined. Most of us, ready to stand up, do so warily on the faltering Grundstruktur of the understanding that, at bottom, let’s face it, this can’t go on, but we must go on. One does not always have to be motored by the certitude of telic success to bring the energy powerlessness, the force of protest into the dark zones of civic despondency.

The sense of betrayal was so colossal and multi-appointed in November that I don’t know whether I, for one, will rock out of my hellhole any time soon. Still, every other day I do send out a mortal to rally the troops and tropes that might revive a numbed and medicated body politic that feels and looks like road-kill. I go into my obsessive loop, mulling over the details of note. What the hell happened here? Is the ascension of Trump a matter, largely, of misogynist apprehension, white masculinist payback, homophobic overflow just when we thought that gay marriage and divorce equality had settled in, cozy and nauseatingly equalized to straight normativity?

Give me another smack of misogyny, the way it fastens onto the imaginary body of a maternal shape and shadow. Day and night I analyze the lethal prompts of a maternal empire that gets swooped down on according to the logic and habits of military aggression. One could say that the field of anal-sadistic military aggression constitutes my specialty, part of my critical arsenal as I probed the arse-upward manoeuvres inherent to my “militerary” domains and invested sites of psychoanalytic mappings. I take it as rigorously necessary that Trump’s mouth-hole be the flapping aperture to funnel floods of radically unleashed aggression, the toxic spill of excrementalized language, part of his recourse to a crucial intersection where twitterature meets shiterature—what Freud has seen as part of the expression of sheer pleasure, puerile and adolescent, involved in an unrestrained propensity to leak language, ugly language, releasing the overjoyed slosh of smut.

Pierre Alferi has recently written about extreme texts of brevity, micrograms where twitterature figures prominently (or, rather, minutely, nano-technologically signalling); shiterature is mine, however, part of my contemplation of the “Kaka céleste” series where I dwell on the locution—sacred, primal, moving—“holy shit!” But that is another story, another narrative pump, even if it can be seen to drip into our political body and deliver an offensive rhetoric of elimination.
A loser son. I don’t know if Trump has cut a backroom deal with China and Russia, tilting power in their direction. I shall limit my scope and speculative grasp to open up elsewhere. For the purposes of this assignment, I am a theorist who likes to get a hold on the way power operates when authority is running on empty, as Hannah Arendt and Alexandre Kojève feared in the face of totalitarian takeover. The fool, Donald Trump, carries no authority, which is precisely where the problem lies, in the violent shudder of the vanishing of authority that this morph of a loser son embodies. It is perhaps not a mere disturbance on the coherence charts that Russia’s position as locatable enemy power is coming apart. With all Schmittian warning systems alerting that we must have the enemy in our sights, that it remains crucial to know and contain a figure of enmity in order to maintain some kind of political sanity—whether propped up as fiction of adversarial opposition or promoted as a real target zone—the point is, that unless one is willing to be Mad Maxed out in the desert of a structureless politics, the adherence to a notion of canny enmity defines the capacity of a nation to ensure its survival. Wait. What?! Are we seriously talking about the need for enmity on the say-so of Carl Schmitt? A pitch for sanity? Sanity: A word hard to pull out these days. Nietzsche 101. Take a close look at the phobic vocabulary of those in charge. The most madly managed trot out their opinions, however violently sharpened, according to a logic of national sanity, as if they were cleaning up a mess, as if they were not the mess and debris of capitalist infraction. The projective inversion of a mess that needs to be cleaned up holds my interest. As a group, as a discourse and launchpad for reckless referential aberrancy, Republican-types have tended to toss out the disavowed residue of internal debris, a floating dumpster impoverishing a world in need of continual nurturance. Cleaning up and cleaning out are endangering ventures. I am putting out an APB on the way Trump generates a false consciousness of hygienic propriety, white surfaces veneering excremental money funds.

The field of cleanliness and articulations of germaphobia will continue to insinuate itself into the discursive habits and decrees, the insidious aggressions and misconstruals, of the current administration. They want to clean up. The fear of contamination, a prompt to xenophobic excess and severe misogyny, the disgust promoted by the smell of women, motor the purported toughness on issues of immigration and other exclusionary operations for which the team of garish white billionaires has already made itself known. Regarding their leader, he comes up as puerile, bereft of superegoical controls. His is not merely an idiot, though Lacan has had a lot to say about the figure of the “idiot
king,” a despotic emergence: he is a map of symptomatological heaves that restrict and bind him, a circumstance which no one would really give a fuck about, if it weren’t in fact pushing the agenda of a gold-plated debilitated subject: the thought of a woman peeing reviles and excites Trump; his grammatical aberration when gushing about pussy, well, I will get to later—

As for that overachieving snot-nose, Carl Schmitt: Yes, a Nazi political theorist at some level makes pitches about sanity and sanitation, wholesomeness, at least in terms of keeping a clean-cut enemy line. Still others contribute to the imaginary and manic compulsion for cleanliness by means that involve, at some level of consciousness, cleansing of ethnic and intestinal proportions, and the sometime mask and mascot Friedrich Nietzsche makes it clear from the start of his genealogical probe that Germans cleave to tropes of digestive disorder, obsessions with phantasms of elimination, evacuation, flushing what gets cleared out as toxic, detachable form the body politic, but this is another matter, or is it? The engagement with tropes of Germanicity, the accumulation of geo-archival memory taps, and even the jokingly stated fact that nowadays one is fleeing to Germany whereas in those days one was fleeing to America from Germany, should not be left to some scholarly sidebar. Wait. I’d like to retract the implied swipe against scholars, if that’s what it was, just now, a kind of reflexive drive-by. Scholars under the regime of Trump are a targeted species, disdained and marked for controlled extinction. I will defend them, even if the feelings are not always mutual and I myself have struggled with the university as an autoimmune lab that kills off any creative spark or sign of vitality. At the same time, yes, the university poses as a sanctuary for politically correct feints, it houses dissidents, bookworms and queers like no other institution of waning solidity. I will refrain from switching on the history channel that features deplorable episodes—ethical misconduct ascribable to university life, racist installations despite affirmative action inlays, and so on. I take these moral deficits on in another text and, for now, I declare a truce and start a protective intervention on behalf of all those who want to study and experience a furlough from the peculiar lashings of the so-called “real world.” Derrida has indicated in his many works on the plights and innovative verve of the university, including in his important article, “The University in the Eyes of its Pupils,” to which I refer you, that we owe the basic structuring of the university to 18th-century German thought.

A national crypt formation. Like the group led by Mohammed Atta on September 11, 2001, the Trump family hails from Germany, though Trump himself disavowed his origins and switched up Germany for Sweden, where he claims he thought his clan came from. Still, the Trumps wanted to go back to Germany after an initial spell of immigration, but were barred from doing so.
That is really too bad, that even the Germans wouldn’t take them back! Trump’s racist golf partner and news source, Bernhard Lang, recently mused that many of those who had voted in November “looked illegal” to him. Trump likes to take his German interlocutor and racialist provocateur seriously. These prods are not merely aleatory bumps in the night or accidents that pockmark the manicured lawn that golfers glide along, whispering casually tossed confidences, teeing off on obscenities. Then there’s Breitbart, ach, ach! Disavowed but still pumping, something returns from Germanic roots and boots, and the rhetoric of unconscious tactical manoeuvres must not be left out of a picture that assumes the false allure of transparency. Laurence Rickels has shown California’s dependency on Germanic tropologies and ideological formations—a homegrown German Ideology. I have explored the way a certain foreclosure of air space in World War Two keeps running aggression back to the United States in a manner that calls for vigilant analysis and, following an understanding of a national crypt-formation, requires more critical attention. Following the thought of Maria Torok, Nicolas Abraham, Rickels, Donato, Cathy Caruth, Cynthia Chase, etc., and Derrida on condemned sites and the revenants that such sites tend to host, I try to locate the crypts and effects of the phantom in recurrent events prompted by historical snags or back-slides. In “Support Our Tropes” and elsewhere I go after the repertory of recurring hits for which historical repression is responsible. For now, all I can delimit is a starting point, maybe offering an aerial view of a symptom geographically pinnable but stuffed with the excess of symbolicity.

New York City has become a national tag for traumatic incursion that double and reflect in a specular way that I’m sure many have noted: 9/11 turns into 11/9, towers relay to each other from the collapsed World Trade Center towers to the hubristic Trump tower. If I had Derridian expanses at my disposal, I would now consider the fate and marking systems that we associate with the tower in prophetic narratives, turns and tropes of Babel and the story of Jericho. In a curious inversion, Trump is phobic about anything that is not a tower or phallically pointing up. The White House gives him the creeps, so he builds a tower across the way and does not want to look down. He cannot even find the light-switch, he whines.

Trump’s poses of buffoonery and his clownish propensity for linguistic reduction, the sheer stupidity and off-the-charts vulgarity of his claims and limited grasp of world-binding obligation— forfeiting the ligature that resides in obligation, part of the constituting acts that bind us to world—his trail of foreclosures in the psychoanalytic sense, ever doubled in the material arrangements of his real estate business, have left the world dumbstruck. Yet I would warn that revulsion should serve only as a first-level affect, part of a
commando reactivity that needs to be refined, contextualized, no doubt even
sublated. For, as disturbingly destructive as his incursions and poses may be,
they serve only to disclose what was already there, as if we had been living
until now, for the greater part, in what Heidegger calls a “negative
hallucination.” Namely, we did not see what was there. Christopher Fynsk
directs us to Nietzsche’s thinking of nihilism in order to get a viewing of this
basket of deplorables (my rough translation, with a Hilary add-on).

Something on the order of a nihilistic disclosure has been exposed, if
under the Germanic name, “Trump,” and manifested in its distorted human
carrier. As alien, disturbing, and inassimilable as the traumatic invasiveness of
the “Trump brand” has been since it crossed over from Germany to Queens into
Manhattan, it would be wrong to treat it only as a loathsome aberration without
secret roots in the makeup of most enlightened and mature social structures and
vigilant controls. Untethered arrogance, proud conceits and failure’s success are
brought up in the figures and disfigurations of Mssrs. Trump and Pence, but in
fact give access to a disavowed shadow part of America—the bright side of
which is being concealed under the shit-pile that Trump and Co. have produced
recklessly, yet with decipherable intention and historical backup. Low-blow
bigotry is not new, nor can it be simply surrendered to the tides of time. What
comes off as new is the revivallist fervour with which names such as
“deportation” and “pussy” have been declassified for public announcement, and
are becoming part of a registry of legitimate prompters to prods of bullying and
social atrocity. Conditions for assuaging precarity, such as outlined by Judith
Butler, have been given the heave ho. And this ho is heaving.

As Lacan had predicted long ago, racism, understood as rapport to the
jouissance of the other, cannot be done away with merely by erosive waves of
enlightened movement, where time itself (and its splintered conceptual
branches) takes care of the clean-up of error, superstition, a degraded version of
will-to-power that consists in oppressive slams of outcast players. In case we
were under the illusion that women were welcome to sit at the table of
historical deliberation, we were wrong—or, as the terrible lessons of the
Balkans has taught us definitively, hatred can sit and simmer for decades, if not
centuries, before it reaches for the neighbour’s throat again. This stir-up of
archaic pain belongs to one of Freud’s enduring insights: hatred, ambivalence,
aggression and other human outreach programs in the spheres of negativity
cannot simply be repressed but are bound to return and pound hard.

For a long while—since the time I was a politically impassioned teen—I
experienced America as being on the brink of civil war, teetering over an abyss
of irreconcilable differences, set in a rough clench that, at moments of grace,
can resemble more of an embrace, part of a nation compelled, against all odds, to hug it out. Most of the time, though, it’s a matter of clashing hard, and the cinema with its excess of violent description tells us a lot a lot about our playbooks of destructive fervour. Still, in my imaginaire, America was meant to gather us up in our tattered clothing, pointed us to a certain, if risky, horizon of promise, allowed us to dream it up according to outrageous protocols of becoming. I was suckled by the generous indication of the American dream. The shutdown marked by Trump has thrown an axe into my imaginaire, momentarily congealed as a frozen sea, to speak with Kafka. Btw, I always speak with Kafka and must revert now to his recast of the Statue of Liberty, who was called by the kids at school “Miss Liberty” in my immigrant childhood. As a grownup I read the philosopheme, “America,” tracking its significance in literary and theoretical texts, the way it works and unworks in setting a horizon of abandon and being. I turn to Miss Liberty, a gift from France, whom I salute inwardly on my walks on the waterfront, the piers. Miss Liberty. She was my first real crush, a full-figured, book-holding being that I looked up to. In Kafka’s prophetic novel, Amerika, the Statue of Liberty, legendary welcoming committee to the destitute, holds a dagger in her clenched fist.

But let me return to Lacan’s lucidity when it comes to the desire for racist resolution, the lure and abiding allure of racism. The racist disposition—stoked, hungry, close at hand—is not merely reducible to a mistake or an effect of ignorance, though there’s a lot of that bumble in its makeup. I don’t think stupidity takes the lead role when it comes to prompting racist and misogynist assaults (in a longer piece, I would separate these two instances of social aggression to the extent that the violation of women feeds into racist diminishments and the two models of aggressive targeting play off each other in ways that one wants to pursue further). In Lacan laced with Klein, the other is seen to take away what you don’t have, marking your deficiency, which gets traded out in projective waves of unabating envy and aggressive clawing at the facticity of the other’s very existence. The target of envious rage gets consistently disparaged and hurt, even if left, so to speak, ontologically intact. No one can live on ontological legitimacy alone, but needs serious welcoming and encouragement, the syntax of “I want you to be,” as Arendt once described the ethical imperative in terms of love for the refugee or endangered other. I have no time for this now, I say to myself, as I want to get out on the streets, do my work and eldercare rounds, I have no time for this, though we are obligated to make time for this—for reading, creating, practicing something like a “reparative imperative” when reading Lacan and Melanie Klein bifocally. (Also, I will not get into his misogyny and pilfering feints when it comes to
women analysts, aaaeeeiiiii! What’s a girl to do? Ach! Don’t get me started. Day in, day out I kid you not we are surrounded by a masculinist S.W.A.T. team. Every effort to repair, undermined. Don’t get me started. The good things, however problematic, are off limits for us. For instance, there’s simply no call for friendship, even among women, in the metaphysical dialup—at most, girls have been accorded some provisional and retaliatory alliances, identificatory contrivances, or other busts in the consolidation of Mitsein. Ach! I don’t think that Hegel, who was in it to win it, was dialectically angling for the capture of powerful affect, for raising the stakes of friendship by turning women into standout enemies, though. When you scroll down the philosophical corridor of determinations, becoming friends—the interlocution or supplement of narcissistic annexation that this may imply—is always and strictly a man’s affair. We inherited this relentless state of things, remain inscribed by its persistence, no matter how removed from the injurious logic of metaphysical say-so one might hope by now to be. Ach! Maybe I was called up by a different politics of friendship, a different grid or writing practice that pulls one close to another’s distress. Let’s not go there—a wonderful American locution that my colleague Eckhart adores. Where, there? Do you btw know what it’s like to be a girl? To take corrosive insults all day long—to have to wrestle down insolence all the time, to wear yourself down proving and outdoing yourself, overcompensating, pushing hard, becoming exhausted to the point of blanking, so much so that you can’t even complain? Don’t get me started.) But let me back down in order to point out that Lacan’s reflections on racism were delivered in a work titled “Television” and addresses all sorts of technological insets, giving us a clue about the growing importance of medial projection when it comes to matters of social aggression, particularly in terms of racism. Donald Trump is largely indissociable from television and its psychic tethers. Stephen K. Bannon started out as a filmmaker, wanting to break into Hollywood. They are always camera-ready. The slogan, “The whole world is watching!” has taken another turn with decisive consequences, in need of further exploration, entrapping everyone in a dismally distorted reality world. Among other things, reality T.V. has inured us to obscene displays of over-the-top wealth, cleaning up the filthy rich through its filters.

To return to the misogynist cast of the moment: Of course, there never has not been a misogynist wall of aggression against which to collapse. Trump didn’t invent a particularly crass form of attack on women but exposed its prevalence and became a loudspeaker for what has always been pelted against those of us so constructed ( provisionally and problematically—but I’m not going to argue this now, though one could state with conviction that it’s
precisely at a time when gendered being is shaken up considerably, proliferating according to mutating assignments, that we can monitor a regressive return to “woman” who, diminished and puffed up at once, conscripted as pussy or lioness, must bring up, from her depleted store, the roar. Again. I am not a woman, strictly speaking, but at times like this, OK, count me in. I’ll stop with boasting that I have the biggest dick in the country (for Shakespeare “country” slips easily into “cunt,” you can cunt me in). So let me stay with something like a rhetorical analysis that shows even the harshest insult to slip on the ice of Trump’s ongoing hostility, some of which unconsciously pillages and reveals something like a national psyche, while a great deal of the outtake belongs to a sinister calculation ascribable to the habits prescribed by corporate fascism and its rapacious takes.

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**The pussy différand.** It seemed like a turning point. Trump was audio-trapped into revealing the invasive cast of his smuttness. Billy Bush was fired, Donald went on to be POTUS. Billy, a remnant of the Bush family on the scene and screen, swiftly kicked the medial bucket. In the following days, Billy had to apologize to his little girls and explain that what they had heard on the media was not really him, or was him, and now he’s different, redemptively set on their side. Trump, in any case, had already disposed of most of that return-of-the-repressed clan—the shrubs, Dubya, W, whatever we had no reason to diminish—that now incites nostalgia, however falsely remembered. Trump was not entirely wrong about the Shit Plate that the Bushes left us with, out of which he crept. The Bush boys may not throw down language about pussy-grabbing entitlement, but they, too, contributed their share to the attack on women and produced a map of maternalized attack zones into which fighter pilots, high on drugs and shooting up porn videos, amped up on rock ‘n roll, dropping their bombs. There are many ways to shut down women, even more to shut them up at home or on the fields of the overblown imaginary.

One thing that was not caught on tape, and to my knowledge received no airplay, involves the grammatical aberration that landed Trump’s statement. I am not certain what to make of the glitch, pointed out to me by a graduate student, foreign but outfitted with a perfect command of the English language. Nor am I certain, as I once was when analyzing the syntactical disturbance and semantic pitfalls of the Bushian cannonade of language alerts and pointing up the consistently failed locution and violent relation to language spilling toxically onto killing fields. Language so battered led one to wonder whether an abusive rapport to language does not in itself trigger massive rounds of harm and other deeds of misfiring. Were these destructions, of language, of being,
not intricately wound up? Neglected language comes out hurting innocent bystanders. I do not include purposively welded distortion, what makes up poetry, sharp linguistic positing, and hip-hop. Nor do I overlook the more or less normal dosage of catachresis that every speech act rhetorically enfolds. Every rapport that language entertains entails abuse. And sometimes the most depraved are highly eloquent.

This Trumpish *impoveryishment* of speech is something different, though, something like endangering neglect, stripping down language to a depleted status of refuge language, displaying flimsy performative tosses of a grammar school child on the edge of throwing a tantrum, reducing world to a limited field made to hold only balled up energy, egological fits. I suspect that the medial success of the locution, “You are fired!” received ratings not only for its economical brutality, a staging of decision and severance that more complicated zones of ambivalence and hesitation repel. You are fired, “signifiered,” you are addressed in your nullity, you are counted out, driven away, called off. And so on. Now I would want to hitch a ride on Blanchot, but I must restrain myself. Have to prepare my class. But let me say just this. The celebrity signifier, “You are fired!” also fires off on the eliminated addressees, targets them as they are tagged out. Trump drew blood from this exclamation—from day one, he tried to fire Obama; he is the commando officer of a huge firing squad that masquerades as a hiring machine, and so on. This is the performativity to which the Trump apparatus aspires, meant to eliminate, but I am only in the early stages of putting together a rhetorical analysis of highly contaminated edges of performative fire power. In this case, I’m just putting out a call, asking that one look at how acts of “firing” weaponize, terrorize, and escalate into convulsive deportation raids, offering the sense also that some things or peoples can be called off or done away with.

What I did want to bring into focus at this time involves the wobble of the pussy-grabbing injury—something that brings us back to Trump’s phobic stances. Let’s review it in slo-mo for a sec. *Normally*, if I can invoke this obsolesced term, one “grabs a pussy,” if that’s what the aggressor is getting at. It may consist in a power grab, a belittling clutch, violent and illicit, a body assault, a reflex of childish or churlish indiscipline. Maybe that is why in some neighbourhoods of slang usage, the vag may be called a snatch. To “grab pussy” is to throw down a synecdochal reduction on a woman (who is in any case always reduced, if Lacanian psychoanalysis is right, to something lacking, a lack, what one does not have). In cooking and other arts, in wide areas of science, reductions have their plate, even their prestige. But Donald did not revert in his celebrity boast to this locution; he has boasted about “grabbing by the pussy.” One commonly grabs by the tail or toe, as in a racist childhood
ditty; one grabs by the horns or balls. Grabbing pussy and grabbing by the pussy indicate different acts and phantasms, one unquestionably intrusive, and the other one possibly more troubled to the extent that it must come from an imaginary prompt, where little Donald or little Hans, little Hands, must disavow Mother’s castration. When you’re a celebrity riding the F-factor (Adorno’s marker for American hotspots of fascism), the statement seems to go, you do not have to face castration—hers, or yours. Beyond the self-articulating consequence that the statement carries, it shows that the terrible responsibility linked to the assumption of powerlessness has been voided. The stakes of authority are such that they make room for and stem from the relinquishment of power even as one strives to protect, support, adjust, govern the sector of the world on which one must take a responsible hold. The aporetic limits of power keep in place the tensational structure from which one must lead off. You know what I mean, right? With Donald Trump at the helm, leadership itself has reached a point of exhaustion, bringing about little more than variants of self-mockery and acute misapprehension as it snaps the world. But every leader finds her shadow part, however mastered, in the lack of constraint and narcissistic blowout episodes generated by the Trump assumption of power/powerlessness. I am not saying that this distortion is lacking bite or to any degree harmless. On the contrary: We are in the hands—reputedly undersized but punishing, capable of outsized smack-downs—of an endangering bloodsucker. Still, Trump himself (if there’s anyone in there, sleepless in that bloated egosphere) has little substance beyond the nihilistic disclosure for which he stands and a nation falls.

The fascistoid urge. How could the nation fall for him, though, and install this mock-up of capitalist vulgarity? Many analyses have rushed in to cover the wound and wonder of the degradation bearing the name of Trump. Had I the time and stamina, if I were not one of those felled by national fatigue syndrome, I would now want to turn to texts of those who were tempted by certain aspects of totalitarianism, the betrayer’s notebooks, to try to understand what the German-American Trump repeats, revises, unconsciously overhauls, consciously drags in. The task, in outline, requires those of us trained to stay with the congested flow, to identify how the fascistoid temptation works from unresolved prior catastrophes that are on the rebound at this time. What is being disclosed now—and why now? This moment, stripped of grace, propelled by cynical excess and caged in by a relentless calculative grid, represents a very crushing death rattle of accumulated political grammars and ethical failures, if that’s what we are called to witness and stare down. In the meanwhile he is grabbing some phantom of the feminine by the pussy. The spectacle of disavowal is served by the broken locution to the world that must witness
deportation of all that is construed as foreign, alien, in breach of an imaginary wholeness about to be rendered “great again.”

Besides the destruction of vulnerable being, marked-down and newly harassable, the age also prepares to attack intellectual, artistic, scientific, and scholarly pursuit. Trump and Co. have registered escalating violence against the increasingly unsheltered precincts of thought and its intellectual branches, family trees, and affiliations. These communities, however disrupted or constitutively insubstantial, must find or invent their retaliatory capacities as they review key survival issues. We can start by looking to those studies that review modalities of aggression, analyzing shades of civic violence, the spiked and concealed itineraries of bullying; we can investigate tropologies of familialism and the theological imprint—prevalent types of artificially sweetened authority that rely on retrograde concepts of power, a Putin ingredient that by no means can be limited to one manifestation or grammar of brute power. All in all (if one can still say this, in the sense of “we all fall down”), we face now an untethered show of force in the absence of authority, in the undertow of decelerating authority. One of his underscored problems and ours: Trump has no authority. This is why one needs to revisit the conditions that prompted Plato to invent authority. When you are disarmed and your so-called powers of rhetorical persuasion are lost on them, the powering up of authority—as fiction, as performative tour de force—gives a polity some leverage to go after the lead devastators of social being. I have pledged many pages to deconstructing the troubled concern with nonauthorized tyrannies in Loser Sons, training on the ferocious regimes that beset us. In many ways I sat it out with this book that scanned the Bush years as I prepared an anticipatory biography of the clan that has broken into our lives, and were invited to do so. They steer the historical destruction that we share under a new morph—a more pernicious type of virus—though the political body was primed for precisely such an incursion, the colossal crisis of democracy.

So many are hurting and diminished. So much has to be done and said, and, already, more needs to be undone, refused to be done or said, though some of the language lashes cannot be unsaid and the raids have begun. Let me do my thing, therefore, and turn to a less topical, more untimely and perhaps, on that account, more telling account of genealogical consequence. What does literature teach us about today’s disarray and essential types of advocacy? How do we hold those who are undercut by ruthless acts of exclusionary violence that head them off at any viable pass? Let me patch us through to a more phantomal call for justice, all the more commanding.

All the more, Elsinore. I am calling you.
2. In the Name of Justice: The Wreckage of Immaturity

Give me another round. There is something that has obsessed me, a kind of recurrent motif, a plaintive cry, put out in my prequel work, and that seems to be calling for attention now, again. Embedded in the book on “loser sons” as provisional site of ending it all, one will find a sustained political reflection on late puberty and the phantasm of maturity. Let me ask you this: Have you ever met a truly mature being (in the sense that exceeds acknowledging mere checkpoints of ageing and the disposition that allows for stepping back, lucidly cooling one’s engines)? There may be some human states of exception here and there, but they, too, show the tendency to lapse into immaturity. Goethe, one of the historically maturest beings according to the tabulations turned in by Nietzsche, fell hard for a teenager when hitting his seventies. But even Goethe, who transcended first chakra nationalisms, regressive familialisms, and all manner of tribal bonding needs, credited his growth to “wiederholter Pubertät,” recurring puberty. The oversized writer counted on the returns of puberty to move on with creative and libidinal abundance, inviting the double edge of abandon and sovereign trespass. He consistently abandoned himself to the returns of adolescent exuberance. At the same time, he was the poet who pressed claims about the correlative intensities of joy and suffering—puberty consigns the upsurging child to pits of pain smoothed over only by the tranquilizing boons of so-called adulthood. Speaking of the *East-Westerly Divan*, I have seen streams of immaturity strike even the wisest gurus and sensible teachers who suddenly go infantile, giggle, play, shriek with laughter. It is not clear where to situate laughter on the developmental scale or when evaluating psychic and somatic outburst, how to account for the spiritual or purifying capacities of laughter and its openness to gender reassignment—or even the way it functions as a *gift* in Freud and, in terms of disrupting vital registers of significance, has left an explosive hole in Bataille and Nancy.

Puberty, perhaps not philosophically mature enough to have become a fully developed concept, sets up a breach, flagging a destructive passage on the road to majority. The minor hits a snag that may never entirely resolve, but is bound to return and deliver an unexpected knockout punch. Sparing only a few, puberty comes around the bend for the second and umpteenth time, to offer faux replenishment or the bumbled bad news of your finitude, foretelling an imminent crash. Driven perhaps on the ontic level by metonymies of the newly flaunted sports car, the unaccountable affair or newly minted wife, a fresh store of aggression and ensnaring spree of *Selbstbehauptung*, the body bump of untimely self-assertion, *acht!*, the return of puberty undermines the flattering
growth chart that humanity assigns to itself. As shock and disruption introduced to the concept of developmentality, puberty is linked, via Lyotard’s political essays, to Kant’s remarkable statements about immaturity. Perhaps now more than ever, we need to look into the malefic drag of immature political behaviours.

Kant sets out from the insight that one wants to remain immature, tethered to authority, kept on a short leash, in an existential and political comfort zone that stalls growth and seasoned decision. In the chapter, “Was war Aufklärung?/ What was Enlightenment? The Turn of the Screwed,” I interrogate such a moment of faltering self-assumption as the passage through puberty.2 I return to this passage—through puberty, in Loser Sons—in order to seize on an issue that has not received sufficient air play, or heir play, and can help us move forward, if that is conceivable, with the Hamlet dilemma, looping a hysterical knot that to this day tightens the noose around what we continue to incorporate and attach to, often unconsciously, as the political body. As weighty as Hamlet has been in terms of inheritance and gateway to the staple of infrastructuring themes of modernity, the play’s remarkable resilience is also due to the flaws it exposes, the way it flatlines and plays dumb, trying to prompt a traumatic truth to speak. A dumb show haunts the dramaturgy as it explores the limits of saying and showing, wondering aloud if it is capable of instigating confession and aligning with justice. One is throttled and voiceless, dependent on a ghost’s directives and plaintive insistence for motive and intelligibility.

Hamlet, who no doubt has slimmed down or was considerably photo-shopped for the portrait we may carry of him, wallet- or poster-size, started out as a pudgy adolescent. Bulked with body excess, he faces off with the bodyless inflation of paternal overdrive. How does Hamlet carry the weight of his heritage? When Lyotard moves on troubled adolescent awakening, he knowingly dwells at the limits of philosophical statement and determination, rehearsing that which may well lie beyond the scope of theoretical reach or investigation. Maybe the overweight waddle of Prince Hamlet is not a matter for speculation or the corporeal zoom, part of sizing his portion of indecisive agony. Or, maybe he needed the carriage of young portliness, a way of taking up space in the kingdom that at once counted him out and counted on him. What about the body of the Prince? How does it reflect the political body, bloated with gluttony, morally emaciated according to the transcripts the Prince handles, in contrast to the vanished body of the King?

This line of questioning, its imprudent check on a figure cut by the Prince, seems no doubt out of bounds for philosophical inquiry as we know it. Philosophy nowadays won’t be starved out, however, and goes after the most minute triggers of obsession. Adolescence, the cusp of immaturity, fits only with difficulty into its bodies, protesting all manner of unjust burdening, and philosophy itself has to be prodded and poked if it is to start reasoning with the unreasonable. This is where Hamlet pushes Horatio on the point of what can happen in excess of philosophical dream schemes: like a girl, a philosophy can dream.

I return to this arena in order to lift a latent strand of thought that may provide us with access to the jouissance of the pudgy Trump, a tantrum-throwing adolescent, chronic complainer, a whiner who may be held back by the line of Kantian immaturity. Unlike Hamlet—though Freud would disagree on this point (he saw Hamlet as making murderous decisions)—Trump is driven by decisiveness, if poorly anchored and motored by faulty assessment or boorish self-advancement. But let me stay with a more savoury figure of immaturity, if one can say so. Hamlet joins the ranks of Lyotard’s Emma and Abraham to the degree that he, too, is staggered by a mode of address that can be integrated only minimally, if at all. This group of hapless receivers have not reached the level of maturity that could reasonably field a call of the magnitude that befalls them. They are traumatically called up by a force or voice or prod that cannot properly be deciphered, yet produces “a strong alteration”—Freud’s designation for the episode of puberty—that occurs when the turnover from childhood to majority is marked.3 Off target yet on the way to them, the call fatefully diverts them and something drastic happens, an uncontrollable spill of being that jostles the kids, relating them to the unrelatable. The jolt that they receive when picking up the untranslatable call or the call that only ever relays its own untranslatability, evokes the shock of puberty—“the rebellious blur bleeding out of the dilemma of impaired comprehension: ‘what is happening (to me)?’”4 I did not want to miss out on focusing a piece of Hamlet’s commando reactivity—the specific way he remains enraged yet stalled, rebellious yet unable to execute a plan or hit an assigned target, girlfriend-bound yet mother-fixated, cute but yet to lose the baby-fat—as part of the unaccountable upheaval, the social out-of-jointedness pertaining to a condition at once common (everyone goes through this self-estrangement, more or less) and alien

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4 Ronell, Loser Sons, 175.
(what kind of freakish monstrosity just got released on the community of family, friendship, and nation, political observers?).

According to Lyotard, the shock of puberty, the rattling call, shapes our political narratives, even as it apparently recedes to raise havoc on more unconscious channels of social behaviour. If I am getting this right, the brand of hysteria ascribable to puberty cuts into the spheres of political performance and agonized concern for justice in a number of ways. My own assessment, reading psychoanalysis’s victims of recurring puberty, is that the excited teen, running high on self-inflationary fuel, and disrupted by an untranslatable address, sparks the scene of action. Puberty’s claims announce themselves each time uniquely, in full revolt of what is. The runaway teen spirit, going nowhere fast, riveted by a sudden arousal, an awakening, enters a stretch of being that remains enigmatic and active, infiltrating all manner of social practice. Occupied to a considerable degree by adolescent tropes of giddiness, overabundance, sarcasm, attack, and ruin—the despondencies and grammars of excitability—the stoppers and starters of social responsiveness still need to be accounted for, even if we lack a grid to tabulate the saturation of the political according to adolescent excitability. Aligned with Abraham and Emma, in terms of the disturbing jolts visited upon these hapless receptors and written up by Lyotard, Hamlet, for his part, proves to be terror-riven as he tries to field a deracinating call that spurs him to stand up in submissive readiness. On one level, though very differently apportioned, they share the predicament of receiving an instruction, an intrusive charge and convocation. They are cocked to respond to a call: ready or not, adolescents are made to assume that a call is meant for them. Hamlet understands that “readiness is all.” But was he ready for what was coming at him? The call rips through them before they are prepared to become who they are, marking an experience of shattering decision that, paradoxically, makes them who they are, skipping the beat and reassuring timing of becoming. They are riveted and invaded by a ghostly call under whose authority they are bound to freeze up.

**The affective haze.** The numbed reluctance to assume responsibility for what continues to arrive unannounced, the coercive pull to take the call sustains the affective haze of political torpor and childish recoil. Still, there are calls, as I have tried to track elsewhere, that should not be taken and are really not meant for those overactive teenagers who presume to be born to set things right—or make America great again. Ach! This is all very difficult to sort out, and there is no way adequately or justly to size up the degraded morph that Trump represents by measure of Hamlet. Still, there is something about immaturity and

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5 Ibid., 177.
complaint that binds them, if on a distorted plane of fun house visuals. One has been stripped of linguistic capacity on which the other expands; yet, they communicate symptoms and share a failure that we will not soon shake. A plan at least has been outlined, emerging from these primal and pulsating jolts that exhort us to adjust a practice to the endangered stance of rigorous hesitation—a concept developed by Lacoue-Labarthe in the thought of cautious ethicity.

The childish nature, wary and ever incredulous on the one hand, prematurely triggered, tight and ready to spring to action on the other, must lean into the emptiness of the voiding call, another name for puberty’s shakedown. According to Lyotard, Kant paved the way of a steep slope on the downside of nothingness, “the Id-side to which I am singularly host and hostage.” Drawing puberty onto the political platform of deed and reflection, Lyotard attempts to maintain something of a philosophical claim: “to speak in an intelligible fashion on the subject of the Id-side of the articulable, that is to say of the Nihil.”

Turning away from an interpretation of drives, Lyotard scrolls down to the Kantian Id-side of things—even though Kant has remained too strongly attached, Lyotard observes, to subjectivist thought, that is, to a philosophy of consciousness. The brand of hysteria ascribable to puberty cuts into the political performance, requiring us to revisit time and again some circumscribed zones of unmarked intensity.

It would be wrongheaded to think that one could simply skip over the motif and developmental-historical stopover of puberty when modern politics have depended so emphatically on teenaged mythologies and fast-tracking disasters.

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7 Ibid., 25.
8 Laurence Rickels, stellar scholar of adolescence and teen passion, together with Winnicott, Eissler, Cavell, and others, renders a political theory of uncontained adolescence. Consider these strong statements that arise from a reflection on juvenile delinquency and politics on the loose: “The secular era (or Teen Age) that begins with Hamlet schedules the origin of its subject according to the first suicidal ideation and the first identification with the ghost.” Moreover, when analyzing what it means, according to Winnicott, for the teen “to skip the relationship to the death of the parents . . . and proceed directly to a position of authority,” Rickels reminds us, at the end of this section: “There was, by [Winnicott’s] reckoning one instance in the recent past of this alternative stabilization of the Teen Age by positioning it society-wide as ego ideal and that was Nazi Germany.” In a recent lecture, Rickels argues that the Nazis dealt with the problem of adolescence by creating the Hitler Youth, a formation that horrifyingly turned teenagers into superegoical monsters. In “The Other Coast of Terrorism: On Sue de Berr’s Hans & Grete” in Terror and the Roots of Poetics, ed. Jeffrey Champlin (New York and Dresden: Atropos Press, 2013), 22 and 25. See also D. W. Winnicott, “Creativity and its Origins,” Playing and Reality (London and New York: Routledge, 1996 [1971]), 65–85;
Perhaps the time-out still observed by *Hamlet* requires a renewed reflection on political action (in the sense of Arendt) and the complaint of puberty (in the sense of compromised sense). Hamlet, excessive and ineffective, modelling the shocked incomprehension of a social body, has only himself to complain to. Hence the famous soliloquy, a filter of the unanswered call of anguish. Trump has Twitter to complain to, and an arsenal ready to go off at any moment.

3. Raising the Visor: Advocating for the Vanishing and Destitute

We advocate for those whose presencing is compromised. This kind of advocacy, bequeathed from beyond (or the past, or the jurisdictions of beckoning futures) may well extend in one form or another, to everybody and nobody or to every nobody, for a ghostly apparition claims body without material grounding—but what do I know, I am merely a scholar who tracks the dimension of unknowables, at the edge of falsifiable evidence. Hamlet’s father, a semi-fiction, aligned with the fiction of paternity, is plated in armour, packaging only a vague insinuation of body. Forcing an address to that which eludes presence, the ghostly apparition, not presently living out his life, but walking the afterlife, returns to Elsinore in the name of justice. For Derrida, the scene, which throws into question all “scenes,” all modalities of seeing or possible sightings, calls up “the principle of some responsibility, beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead, be they victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalistic, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism . . . without this non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present, without that which secretly unhinges it, without this responsibility and this respect for justice concerning those who are not there, of those who are no longer or who are not yet present and living.”

The disadjustment that Derrida reviews along the lines of Hamlet’s grievance—slashes of untimeliness posed and exposed by the ghostly interlocutor—says that justice is still outstanding in the sense that it is still due,


undelivered. Any call for justice approaches us with the delivery systems of the phantom, latent but persistent, part of a patrimonial logic that shakes us awake, usually at midnight, when daytime is de-occupied, and the non-contemporaneity of what is serves an ethical subpoena. Derrida speaks of the visor-effect of the specter that summons Hamlet, the way the ghost sees without being seen in terms of the face that he conceals, and, we can add, in tune with the drastic superegoical broadcast system that this set-up entails.

**Disjuncture as the very possibility of the other.** The question that leaves us hanging is one that bears down on our political bodies, their inscriptions and orientations, still baffling—and as untraceable as the origin of a categorical imperative: from whom (or what) do we take our orders, whether these are marching orders or the ordering sense of world, under the sway of what or whom does one feel prodded, become answerable, motivated or immobilized, deprogrammed, set for action, ideologically retrofitted, and so on? In other words, which plaintive transmitters acquire legitimacy in the line up of calls taken, flooding the sonic atmosphere with purposeful alarms racing at us from elsewhere? Even our most mundane political call outs and deliberations, our temptation fed continually by the thought of action, crucially involves a spectropolitics. Just consult Marx or any revolutionary transmitting system that deals out canny political analyses and listens to the unsaid, often accompanied by tremendous static.

Complaints launched against Claudius come to a standstill due only in part to a neurotic relation to time—who does not have a neurotic relation to time, a hysterical sense of speed-up or melancholic slow down, and so forth, or not, precisely, no forth; well maybe Heidegger does not have a discernibly hysterical relation to time, but who writes two or more volumes on time, crosses one of them out, resumes differently, returns to lost premises, casts them off again only catastrophically to misread the historical times disdaining all sorts of temporal tip-offs and archaic regressions, crossing back into time and being, and so forth? One would need to consider rigorously the differing flow charts of time in Heidegger—waves of granting, types of favouring, the beat of poetic donation, denials and instabilities of and in time set between moments, undecidably given as trace, as well as figuring the modalities of time given as indeterminacy (arche, lapse, moment, eschaton, duration, present, suspension, telos, hurried instances, diachrony, the rush of ec-static temporality, etc., etc.).

10 For more good times—hollow times, bad timing, the empty interval, dead zones—see my *Finitude’s Score: Essays for the End of the Millennium* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 5ff.
In all this expanse and depth of reflection, does Heidegger also give consideration to temporal drain-offs, to the depletion calibrated by time’s destructive recoveries and irretrievable losses—does his work showcase the Complaint of Time, recalling the way that Erasmus produced *The Complaint of Peace*, which, in that case, elucidates the way she has been forgotten, maligned by misbegotten theorems, turned the wrong way? The answer is by no means simple and, in some ways, yes, he does, for time has needed to be rethought and reset. Clearly, the larger cast of these questions must be engaged elsewhere. On the one hand, in shorthand, there is in his work little room for complaint, or even for the too-Jewishly flavoured lament. Perhaps some vital aspects of these questions can be handled with the password “Hamlet.” (Admittedly, my own/disowned, ex-appropriated hysterical relation to time and being makes me precipitate, fall out of the succession [and success] of scholarly pacing and theoretical measure: I apologize for the quasi-rant, a modality of complaint, held back by the complacencies of insinuation and lost ground. Ach, ach!)

I apologize for being in such a hurry—and anyway, I am clearly mistaken, one could say that all of Heidegger is one big complaint about the oblivion of Being even though, as Levinas has observed, Dasein, never seen eating, can also be said never, ever, never to complain, isn’t it the case that Heidegger has no viable admissions policy for the thought of *Klage*, complaint—oh, maybe I am entangled in the aporetic trap of complaining about Heidegger, as if one could take recourse in any hope of avenging his work, or put up a fight against his call to Being, a preposterous theoretical stance. End of quasi-rant.

The complaint that Claudius has abused power cannot entirely fly. The exercise of power is always haunted by its susceptibility to abuse, rendering the trope that handles the abuse of power a mark par excellence of sovereignty. There are at least two ascensions to contend with, illicitly if intimately wrought: that of Hamlet, King of Denmark, to the ghostly realm, that of Claudius to the material, worldly realm of sovereign decision. The complaint against the abuse of power can never fly to the extent that it guarantees the sovereign hold, which in some respects bounces charges of abuse off its shiny armour. It may be that Hamlet’s father, laying the complaint on his son of his predicament, commits abusive language acts as deposed sovereign. In this arena, the complaint keeps one in the throes of an irretrievably losing streak. One is out there, voided, ghosted, twisting in the air.

Among so many time-released questions and effects of language, Hamlet raises the question of what it means to make things right, or to presume that one was called upon to do so. How one encounters the grievance coming
from above depends on any number of strategic considerations and incalculable pulls in the direction of reparative justice. Is the death of one’s father something that can be repaired? Can one go up against maternal jouissance? How to count down the days of regulated mourning when the reigning king asks that you get with the program, integrate back into social connectedness and viability?

I will limit my stab at an answer to the subject at hand, with the understanding that the text continues to pound out a number of pertinent angles on its failure to commit to the dictation of conventional forms of vengeance, some more compelling than others when it comes to understanding the way justice is meted out or utterly sideswiped, returned to sender. The double plaintiffs, Hamlet and Hamlet, are barred from taking action following coded protocols of revenge-seeking engagement. We get a clue of this when Prince Hamlet pulls out a pen rather than a sword, moving to the arena of writing, erasure and deferral, under ghostly dictation, noting the paternal grievance, pencilling in a schedule for recovering the damages. The quickened pulse of law understood as revenge-based halts for a moment of rigorous indecision, purposefully miscarried. The complaint is entered as component part of a writing machine rigged only to interrupt the call of immediacy, the demand for equivalency (on which justice, according to Nietzsche, is based) and closure. Hamlet will obtain his end, we could say, but this sense of finality does not coincide with closure. Such a structure that resists closure runs analogue with the mourning disorder that wears him down until the suicidal ending in excess of closure, leaving Horatio to write it up and Fortinbras to marshal the new influx of troops, effecting a flex of law enforcement that abandons the endless reflection on justice off the revenge clock and in the generality of time. Time is up, a new army of tropes takes over the scene without justice rendered or evil-doing accommodated. The complaint has run its course without a final checkpoint or wrap of meaningful conclusion. Perhaps the “without” indents the fateful moment, a formulation of “out” that still hinges on a remnant of “with,” the dependency that Derrida elsewhere has marked as the privation of “without,” ever dependent in English on “with,” an enduring indication of being-with struck out but still precariously retained. I am without you, hanging onto the memory of a “with” taken away.

As he lay dying, Hamlet’s split-second of sovereignty, with Claudius counted out, is without historical duration yet nonetheless constitutes an event. The quiver of ascension to a vacant throne drives him to make a decision that was neither called for nor secured under law: the tremulous ascension coupled with imminent decline allows for Hamlet illegitimately to “elect” Fortinbras as his rightful successor, as Rebecca Comay has shown as she monitors the step-by-step of Hamlet’s stammering death-drive and short-lived election campaign.
It is hard to time Hamlet’s dying or resolve on a death certificate, for he announces his demise according to different clocks of deferred finality: I am dead, Horatio, I die, I am dying, I die, I must, it speaks—winding down according to a staccato, a lurching sense of timing, an intemporal spasm of expiration. The drama leaves it unclear where the complaint eventually falls, on the side of justice or evil. To the extent that it has drawn out its time and outrun the limits of clocked action, the complaint as disposition and defiant halt, initiated by Hamlet the Dane, appears to be in cahoots with the very wrong it criticizes: it has known only to prolong the span of an injurious misdeed.

In *Specters of Marx*, when auditing the economy of vengeance and punishment, Derrida discusses disjuncture as the very possibility of the other. Without hitting the pause button, he names Hamlet in the context of the complaint: “If right or law stems from vengeance, as Hamlet seems to complain that it does—before Nietzsche, before Heidegger, before Benjamin—can one not yearn for a justice that one day, a day belonging no longer to history, a quasi-messianic day, would finally be removed from the fatality of vengeance? Better than removed: infinitely foreign, heterogeneous at its source? And is this day before us, to come, or more ancient than memory itself?”¹¹ Derrida puts out a call for justice that would roll out of Hamlet’s plight, redescribing the struggle with a complaint conceived by and addressed to justice, disclosing the very concept that until now underlies justice. Thank Gd for the American Constitution, which seems time and again to bounce back and hit hard against excessive episodes of harassment. But the Constitution stands on fragile ground, susceptible to interpretive warfare and corrosive aims. In keeping with Derrida’s concern, the law itself, susceptible to further interrogation, belongs at the outset to a compulsion for vengeful reactivity. This is the case with many legal systems and sites, implementation. We find ourselves at a moment of particularly strong indications of abusive vindictiveness, when the law is turned to its origin in acts and affects of vengeance. At this time, in this disjointure, it does not suffice to call out flexes of aberration or lawlessness, but we might begin, again, ach! to explore further, more rigorously than ever, how the pernicious weaponizing and misuse of law against the vulnerable among us originates with the law and grabs onto justice as part of its disavowed self-legitimation. How fatiguing for us all! Worn down, exhausted, dimmed, we feel that we can’t go on, yet we must go on, leaning into the emptiness of an energy-sapping task.

*Ach*! Let me call it a day. Tomorrow I will rise up differently. To be continued.