History, Myth and the Worker Body: Vienna Actionism within the *Longue Durée* of 1848

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Abstract

In June 1968, at the University of Vienna, artists Otto Muehl and Gunter Brus staged a radical action called *Art and Revolution* using the body and its most base processes, instead of traditional media, as primary material. Following the failed revolutions of 1848, Richard Wagner, composed an essay bearing the same name, arguing for the unifying potential of a total artwork. The purpose of the University action was to question the role of art under advanced capital, while denouncing the repressive hypocrisy of civilizing processes, with the whole, I argue, amounting to a collision between the material body and aesthetic practice as political action. This dissertation examines the Vienna Actionists’ reaction to the limitations imposed by painting, within the *longue durée* of 1848, as a response to a historical trajectory which eroded the political weight, or “mattering,” of the finite body. It situates them in relation to their inheritance of an aesthetic discourse which privileged totalization in the midst of a modernist narrative that mirrored this aforementioned corporeal erosion through its insistence on abstraction. This study resists an argument which posits the development of modernity as driven solely by the pursuit of pure reason, viewing the Romantic critique of Enlightenment as an equally vocal note in the elaboration of aesthetic and political modernity. I view the Actionists’ focus on the body’s finite materiality in the aftermath of fascist violence, in the midst of a postwar rise in consumer culture, and in relation to a modern discursive obsession with estrangement, as an attempt to call attention to the political stakes of a historically contingent corporeal alienation. I understand, however, their act of total refusal to be diluted by their operation within the limits and language of a masculinist established order. VALIE EXPORT, in response to her male cohort, I argue, occupied a more suitable position to expose the brutality of processes of subjugation based on bodily difference, further exposing a corporeal imperative to collective cohesion. I posit her refusal, however, to be limited by her own normative subject position, thus exposing a repeated myopia toward the totality of fragmented social ties.
Lay summary

This text examines the radical performance art of the Vienna Actionists in the 1960s in which they used the body as a primary material, discarding traditional artistic media. It considers their transgressive actions to be a symptom of the period’s greater social unrest; a rebellion against repressive post World War II conditions and the exploitative nature of capitalism. Their aesthetic outburst is investigated within a greater historical trajectory, as a delayed reaction to the social, political and economic conditions set in place with the failures of the revolutions of 1848 in Europe, argued to be the point of departure of a long century dominated by the triumph of capital over the political mandate of fostering equality and social cohesion. This study, therefore, views their work as attempting to draw attention to the political “mattering” of the body and this through their, at times violent, exposure to its base materiality.
Preface

This dissertation is an original and independent work by the author, Vanessa M. Parent. All images included are reproduced with permission from the artists or their representatives. Portions of Chapter III of this dissertation have been approved for publication as part of an edited volume. The text is titled “Mediated and Domesticated: On the Disruptive Potential of the Non-Labouring Female Body” and was presented at the University of Leeds (UK) on the occasion of the conference Speak/Body: Art, the Reproduction of Capital and the Reproduction of Life in April 2017. The forthcoming volume will be edited by Dr. Griselda Pollock and published by I.B. Tauris as part of their New Encounters Series. No date has been set for its publication.

# Table of Contents

Abstract ............................................................................................................................................ iii

Lay Summary ..................................................................................................................................... iv

Preface ............................................................................................................................................... v

Table of Contents ............................................................................................................................. vi

List of Figures ..................................................................................................................................... viii

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................................... ix

Dedication .......................................................................................................................................... x

INTRODUCTION: *Hamartia*: the Body at the Intersection of History and Nature............... 1
  Art and Revolution ......................................................................................................................... 3
  *Longue Durée* and Immiseration ............................................................................................ 14
  *Hamartia* .................................................................................................................................. 19
  Historicity ...................................................................................................................................... 32
  1848-1968 Triumph of Capital .................................................................................................. 35
  Historical Materialism and Painterly Realism ........................................................................ 42
  Actionism, the Body and Aesthetic Revolt ............................................................................. 46
  The Body and Politics ................................................................................................................ 49

CHAPTER I: History ....................................................................................................................... 59
  Art, Politics and Civic Unity ....................................................................................................... 64
  History, *Hamartia* and Recursion .......................................................................................... 66
  History: Time and Money .......................................................................................................... 77
  Repression, Rupture and Return .............................................................................................. 82
  1968 ............................................................................................................................................ 89
  Religion: Austria, the Body and Repression ........................................................................... 93
  Reason: The Enlightenment and the Dematerialization of the Subject ................................ 107
  Reification: The Body and Abstractions .................................................................................. 125

CHAPTER II: Romantic “Myth” and The *Gesamtkunstwerk* .................................................. 140
  Eroticism, Expenditure and Emancipation ............................................................................... 150
  *Fin-de-Siècle* Vienna and the Romantic Myth of Redemption ............................................. 156
  The *Gesamtkunstwerk* and the Central European Tradition of Romanticism ................ 159
  Wagner: Revolution and the Total Artwork .......................................................................... 161
Viennese Modernism ................................................................. 169
Klimt, Wagner and the *Beethoven Frieze* ................................ 174
Enlightenment, Romanticism and Capitalism .......................... 182
The Total Art and Action ........................................................ 186
Desacralization and Depoliticization ....................................... 188
Fascism and the Aestheticization of Politics ............................ 191
Procedural Violence: The *M-Apparatus* and Abreaction ....... 193
Nitsch: Affect and Abreaction ................................................ 200

CHAPTER III: The Worker Body .............................................. 210

Semiotics and Self-Reclamation .............................................. 211
Determined, Disciplined and Domesticated ............................ 219
Woman as Worker Body: Discipline, Abjection and Heterogeneity 235
The Disruptive Potential of the Non-Labouring Female Body ..... 245
Reproductive Life and the “State of Exclusion” ....................... 258
The Scope of the Visible and the Striking Body ..................... 266
Flesh, Determination and Recursion ....................................... 269
Re-presentation: Collapsing Figure and Flesh ........................ 276

CONCLUSION ........................................................................ 285

Figures .................................................................................. 308

Bibliography .......................................................................... 315
List of Figures

Figure 1. *Kunst und Revolution* Poster, Vienna, 1968 ............................................................308

Figure 2. Otto Muehl, Gunter Brus, Oswald Wiener. *Kunst und Revolution*, 1968 University of Vienna, Photograph by Khasaq .................................................................309

Figure 3. Hermann Nitsch, 5th Action Vienna, 1964 Photograph by Ludwig Hoffenreich & Sigfried Klein .................................................................310

Figure 4. Hermann Nitsch, *Oedipus*, 1990 ..................................................................................311

Figure 5. Otto Muehl. *Leda mit dem Schwan*, 1964 Photograph by L. Hoffenreich .................................................................312

Figure 6. Otto Muehl. *Leda mit dem Schwan*, 1964 Photograph by L. Hoffenreich .................................................................313

Figure 7. Otto Muehl, *Material Aktion 17: O Tannenbaum*, 1964 Photograph by Marc Adrian .................................................................314
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For Mom, Dad and MJ.
Introduction

_Hamartia_ and The Body: The Intersection of Recursive History and Dominated Nature

_The best tragedy is so composed as to arouse pity and terror...For pity is concerned with unmerited misfortune, fear with a character like ourselves. There remains the intermediate kind of character: not pre-eminent in moral excellence, nor falling into misfortune through vice and depravity but through some hamartia...the change being from good fortune to bad, not vice versa, not through viciousness but through a substantial error._

-Aristotle, _Poetics_, ch. 13. c.335 BC.

In the 1960s in Vienna, a city situated at a distance from the cultural dynamism of London, Paris or New York and of the decade’s equally effervescent social and political upheaval, artists Otto Muehl, Günter Brus, Hermann Nitsch and Rudolf Schwarzkogler formed the very loosely affiliated group known as the Vienna Actionists. Following the primacy of the painterly gesture as it had been elaborated and over-invested with significance in abstract painting, in conjuncture with the unveiling of the artist’s body in performance and the neodadaist gestures of Fluxus and Happenings, the Actionists’ staged extreme actions and action-events\(^1\) informed by the limitations encountered within traditional mediums and emerging from their struggle with painting, now tending toward the deployment of the body as a primary material. Through sensuous encounters with the body, in some cases as a means to activate its deep psychical layers to purge repressed impulses, their aim was to attack the representational function of traditional artistic media, seeking a new idiom of gesture and trace that

\(^1\) Actions can be defined as radical performances, either public or in more private settings, following a particular score in an effort to move away from representation and towards the presentation and experience of concrete events.
could both access and mobilize somatic experience as art had never before done.² This new idiom sought liberation from the structures, constraints and perceived hypocrisies of social and cultural conventions which painting and other forms of twentieth century art continued to represent despite the modernist and historical avant-gardes.

Following 1968 and in response not only to the Actionists’ domination of the Viennese art scene, but also to that condition’s symptomatic articulation of masculinist dominions over history and culture, artist VALIE EXPORT used performance and film to addressed the historical emergence of forms of mediation as it operates on and through the female body, long subordinated to the role of sexual object and reproductive worker as guarantor of patrilineal continuity or, with the advent of capitalism, of market-mediated and unmediated work.³ EXPORT engaged directly with, and challenged, heteropatriarchy as it established itself in forms of mediation in response to capitalist modernity. EXPORT’s work called attention to the gendered determination and sexual instrumentalization of the gendered and marked body while exposing it as the locus of both social and cultural anxiety which, historically, had warranted its systemic disciplining. She addresses its fixity as site of sexual differ-


³ VALIE EXPORT is a name she adopted using all capitals.
Marisa C. Young determined that in terms of precarious work, internationally, women are grossly over represented. Furthermore “differences in wages, security, work hours and union protection suggests that women experience a greater degree of precariousness in various types of employment.” (75). This articulates the point that while women have gained access to the workforce with the rise of capitalism, they have not been granted equality in pay or protection. Their labour remains undervalued in comparison to their male counterparts.
ence within structured reality resulting in woman’s subordination as, what I refer to as “worker body”; whether as commodity for exchange or as the source from which value, in terms of labour power, extracted and generated under capital.

**Art and Revolution**

On June 7th, 1968, the Austrian Socialist Student Association (Sozialistische Österreich Studenten, or SÖS) invited Actionists Otto Muehl, Günter Brus, two of the main protagonists of the loosely affiliated group called the Vienna Actionists whose work is the focus of this study, to participate in its event *Kunst und Revolution* which took place in a lecture hall at the University of Vienna (fig. 1). In front of an audience of five hundred students, the event began with SÖS members delivering a speech on the conditions of art, its possibilities and its functions under capital (fig. 2). It was followed by a reading of *Psychology of Thought and Speech* by Oswald Wiener, a member of the *avant-garde* literary group Wiener Gruppe, which analyzed the relationship between thought and language. Wiener’s writing, highlighting his linguistic skepticism, dissolved narrative “into the sentence as its basic structure, and considered … the dependence of fact on language use.”

In other words, and with a Wittgensteinian approach, Wiener’s text outlined how language and its basic structures influ-

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4 Bianca Theisen, *Silenced Facts: Media Montages in Contemporary Austrian Literature*. Amsterdamer Publikationen zur sprache und Literatur Vol. 152 (Amsterdam, NE: Rodopi, 2003), 29. Additionally, Theisen explains the overall argument of the *Wiener Gruppe* saying: “they deter a subliminal violence and oblivion in the microcosm of social relationships, a brutal dullness in the stale metaphors and trite expressions of every day communication, or when they point to the microfascisms latent in common percepts, they take a decisive anti-representational stance. Reality is no longer ontologically given, it is seen as a reality phenomenologically constructed from linguistic and cultural schemata, from scripts of communication and frames of perception.”(3).
ence the course of our thinking. Wiener’s overall role in the event was to highlight the oppressive inadequacy of language, which he argued “is constitutive of what we see as reality.”

Wiener’s presentation was followed by Muehl’s tract about Robert Kennedy called *Another Zero Less*. In the speech, Muehl called the presidential candidate, who had been assassinated a few days earlier, a “guileless pig who wanted to buy power with the millions that he had swindled.” The text also called for the death of Jackie Kennedy, alluding to a desire for the elimination of an American “aristocracy” as well as American culture, politics and economic imperialism.

While these texts were being read, Günter Brus, undressed, cut himself with razor blades, drank his own urine, vomited, defecated and smeared himself with his own feces. He then proceeded to lie down and masturbate. While this display of the body’s most base and natural processes, “spilling outside” itself in public, were undoubtedly shocking, it also provided a formal and material expression to the scathing cultural criticism being read aloud by Brus’s comrades. The abject quality of the actions suggest a violent, embodied, and visceral reaction to History, a reaction deployed as resistance to oppressive existing conditions. It reflects, I argue, a rebellion against a Nietzschean “interiorization.” That is, against the turning inwards of natural instincts which have been denied free play, or against a historically |

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7 Green, “Introduction,” in *Writings of the Vienna Actionists*, 13.

8 I capitalize the term history here to set it apart from its understanding as a specific academic subject or narrative composed of a sequence of events. Instead I mean it to refer to the totality of interrelated social, political, economic and cultural factors which, escaping unconsciousness, shape lived conditions, inscribing themselves into the psychical and physical metabolism of an individual and group.
contingent morality which has endeavoured to repress instinctual drives and promote the development of guilt, the whole being the greatest source of man’s unhappiness. Following this, Muehl beat a masked masochist with a military belt while the masochist read pornographic material. After the beating, the masochist expressed his enjoyment and revealed himself to be a professor of philosophy at the university, folding together what can be posited as the historically incongruous pursuit of reason and knowledge with the “irrational,” and indeed perverse, libidinal drives of the natural body. The formal elements of this portion of the performance are telling. While not only performing a “belief about an inherent connection between sexual liberation and political struggle,” a symptom of 1960s revolutionary ethos, the masochist’s compliance to the beating with a military belt, a stand-in for state violence, as well as the tension presented by his position as a philosopher and his non-normative sexual fetish, I argue, mirror the historically contingent dialectical pull between Reason and Nature. Also, while flying in the face of sexual taboos, the enactment of the sadomasochist power dynamics exposed deeply rooted sexual repression which was at the forefront of discontent among the youth at the time. It also highlights Vienna’s seemingly divergent position as conservative Catholic imperial centre on the one hand, and intellectual hub at the forefront of psychoanalytical research on the other. The co-mingling of these two seemingly incongruent positions — one based on salvation via the suppression of the body’s natural urges and the

9 See Friedrich Nietzsche’s *On Genealogy of Morality* (1887), translated by Maude Marie Clark and Alan J. Swensen (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.1998). Nietzsche understands the idea of a human conscience to have coincided with the suppression of natural instincts. Conscience is the source or gauge which alerts man to feelings of guilt, feelings which are tied to the trespass of social and cultural structures tied to the notion of morality.

other on emancipation from culturally imposed repression stemming from the transference of infantile vulnerability onto divine authority[11] — I argue, inform an understanding of why the Viennese context gave birth to such a radical form of aesthetic rebellion. It performs Vienna’s own paradox, inherent in its fervently Catholic identity and its inquiries into the individual and collective consequences of corporeal repression via Freud and Reich respectively. The dichotomy inherent between a religious ideology which assigns a damning immorality to non-reproductive sexuality on the one hand and a discourse focused on the primacy of repressed sexual drives as well as its effects on the psyche on the other, provided a rich context for the aesthetic exploration of the radical political potency of the fleshy, finite, material body. Conversely, both are not so opposite in their aims, at the core of which is deliverance and emancipation, whether from an original sin or an “originary” trauma.

The event at the University of Vienna presents perhaps the apogee of Actionism’s transgression in terms of its deployment of the unencumbered material body, a form of procedural violence, as a deliberate and rather transparent attack against institutions, whether academic or political, understood as complicit or implicitly involved in upholding an oppressive social order. Due to the graphic nature of their actions, which included in some cases references to self-inflicted violence, bodily fluids, butchered animals and overt sexual intimation, as well as to their emphasis on narrowing the gap between art and life (an aim also articulated, albeit executed differently, by the Bauhaus and later Fluxus with whom the Actionists collaborated on the occasion of the Direct Art Symposium in London in 1966), their ac-

tions had been the target of critical dismissal — especially within their contemporary mo-
ment garnering them jail time and even exile — as Gerald Raunig points out in his text “Art
and Revolution ’68: Viennese Actionism and Negative Concatenation.” The present inquiry,
however, argues for a consideration of the political weight of their radical refusal of the dom-
ine order, precisely as it pertains to that order’s social, cultural and economic processes’
violent determination, disciplining and instrumentilization of the living body from which a
modern condition forced an alienation. The stakes of this inquiry lie, therefore, in the
body’s role within individual political subjectivity and collective engagement. It hinges upon
the acknowledgement of a corporeal exigency manifest in the struggle against mass alien-
ation under capital, and in the reparation of a historically and culturally contingent social di-
vision, inherited and reproduced by capital. The extent of this corporeal grounding to social

12 Gerald Raunig says of the criticism directed towards Actionism: “Viennese Actionism and its pro-
tagonists have often been attacked… not only large portions of the popular press but also the art-art
scene long insisted that Actionism belonged to the realm of non-art, from the left there were accusa-
tions of fascism.” Gerald Raunig “Art and Revolution ’68: Viennese Actionism and Negative Concat-
atenation” in *Art and Revolution: Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century* (Los Angeles,

Vienna Actionism has more recently garnered greater scholarly attention and has been discussed in
terms of rebellion and destruction in relation to painting and institutional structures within the specific
historical context of the 1960s Cold War in Europe. Curator of Vienna’s Museum Moderne Kunst,
Eva Badura-Triska (2012), views their work as an expansion of painting as a means of providing
more intense sensorial experiences of reality, one which representational painting could not provide.
Ferdinand Schmatz and Jamie Owen Daniel (1992) argue that their psychical and bodily innervations
allowed for liberation from systems of signification, to construct a new way of life as art. Gerald
Raunig (2007) understood their June 1968 *Kunst und Revolutions* as a meeting of weak forms of artist-
ic and political collectivity, yielding little impact due to a lack of consensus imitating the party form.
More recently, Beth Hinderlater interrogates the violence inflicted on the body as political act. in her

13 My use of the term “alienation” is informed by its Marxist connotation, signalling a sense of es-
trangement experience by the worker under capital due to the exteriorization of the productive forces
of his body in the form of the commodity. However within this study I also use it to denote an es-
trangement which goes beyond that experience under capital. I consider a similar form of alienation
from the corporeal dimension of the self to be enforced by Enlightenment thought and Christian doc-
trine.
division is made all the more evident with VALIE EXPORT’s work in which she engages with social division based on bodily difference or deviation from a discursively constructed normative body against whom all others’ worth is appraised and which has supported division along class lines. In short, this study addresses the brutality implied by the mediation of bodies by discourse, culture and capital and how that mediation impedes a consciousness of the full spectrum of an oppressive contemporary condition and the history from which it sprung. It therefore goes beyond the suggestion, though germane to this inquiry, that their procedural violence “applied to the body as material seeks to overturn the originary violence that is the basis of state power,”¹⁴ considering it instead in relation to a greater historical and social totality and in relation to the body’s role in political subjectivity, both individual and collective.

This project contends that the formal qualities of the Actionists’ works call attention to a body that precedes early modern social inscriptions that are the inheritance of the present model of understanding the body and its relation to consciousness, and to a historical and cultural trajectory which rendered the body, its instinctual drives and inevitable mortality, something to fear and dominate along with Nature, while clouding the connection between the individual, social and political body. While I will investigate this term and its historicity at length throughout, I will begin for now by defining it as that which has operated through the

¹⁴ Beth Hinderliter, “Citizen Brus examines his Body: Actionism and Activism in Vienna 1968” October 147 (Winter, 2014): 78-94, 79. https://doi.org/10.1162/OCTO_a_00167. Hinderliter here speaks more specifically of Brus’s actions such as Körper-Analyse (1969) and Zerreissprobe (1970) in which he examines his bodily processes and enacts an extreme stress test upon his body respectively. Neither of these actions will be discussed in this text as I choose to focus on those preceding 1968, demonstrating their work as symptomatic of a corporeal malaise with political stakes leading up to a moment of collective refusal.
longue durée as a support for cognition, consciousness and the seat of the individual located in a matrix of social relations, suffering historical disciplining as carrier of the soul in Christian theology, as impediment to rational thought and as labour power under capital. On the other hand, this finite, suffering, instinctually driven body encompasses the totality of sensuous human powers, or what Marx calls *Gattungswesen* (species-being).\(^{15}\) The body as “species-being” is described in Marx’s *1844 Manuscripts* as an active natural being whose sensuous vital powers, or “tendencies and abilities” exist as instincts.\(^{16}\) Furthermore, “as a natural, corporeal, sensuous objective being he is a suffering, conditioned and limited creature, like plants and animals.”\(^{17}\) The Actionists engaged with the potential political stakes of this pre-linguistic and alienated corporeality by exposing the body’s limits: in Brus’s self-mutilation, in Nitsch’s rending of animal carcasses, in Muehl’s expressions of sexual taboos, in Schwarzkogler’s seemingly amputated and bandaged body, the body’s materiality and finitude is revealed. The radical unveiling of the material, desiring body stifled by historically contingent oppressive cultural constructs, acts as resistance towards the attrition of that materiality’s political significance in terms of its worth as life itself (removed from the discourse of production), as well as towards its dismissal by modern bureaucratic models of governance supposedly built on foundations of democratic equality. The consequences of this are evident in the state-led violence of the twentieth century. The historical, economic and intel-


\(^{17}\) Ibid.
lectual trajectory that has led to this political devaluation and instrumentalization of the material body, and which will be explored in Chapter I, is characterized first by the subordination of the body to the purity of the soul and then to the superiority of the mind, as well as the alienation of the worker from the body caused by the abstraction of value from its labour. The result, which also articulates the stakes of this inquiry, is the withering of the social significance of shared materiality among the collective, or rather of the recognition of a common humanity disentangled from cultural mediation, thus leading to greater social fragmentation. This condition has impeded the reparation of division along the lines of class, gender or race for example, while capitalism has encouraged a preference for social stability to the rewards and risks which come along with radical egalitarian change. This preference for the maintenance of whatever privileges one has at the expense of solidarity, a social and political homeostasis so to speak, manifests itself as a form of historical recursion which will be further explored throughout as pendant to this collective historical wounding. That is, a cycle of ruptures and returns, further strengthening the gravitational pull for individuals and groups to participate in their own oppression, disguised as freedom, has perpetuated a collective malaise, mass alienation and the “wants” of the few having priority over the needs of the many.

18 Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Capital* (London, UK: Abacus Books, 1995), 38. Hobsbawm makes this claim about the bourgeoisie in 1848, thus naming the prioritization of stability and of one’s material conditions as an impasse to radical political change and solidarity. This sentiment, as capitalism takes greater hold throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, extends to all strata of society further supporting the claim that capitalism implies a participation in the maintenance of oppressive conditions as well as a participation in one’s own oppression. Hobsbawm’s point speaks to the stakes of this inquiry as well as to 1848s place as initiating a certain set of political and social conditions.
This dissertation seeks to expand the examination of the Actionists’ actions, entrenched in and revolving around a conceptualization of the body inherited from Christianity, Enlightenment and the economic mode of production known as capitalism, beyond their Viennese context and an immediate post-fascist, post WWII, Cold War framework. It seeks to examine their outburst’s significance within a greater historical duration and social totality as it relates to the structural social conditions of modernity such as corporeal alienation and social fragmentation, as well as the failures of a Western democratic political project due to that project’s tethering to the maintenance of capitalist interests. In doing so, their work would then be understood as both a symptom of, and retaliation against, a more extensive collective malaise or collective body problem, and therefore, would be heeded as articulating more dire political stakes than mere taboo-breaking fascistic non-art. This text argues that the Actionists’ radical aesthetics in the midst of the social unrest of the 1960s, within the historical framework of the longue durée of 1848, in which the conditions imposed by capital concretized abstraction as a modern lived and aesthetic condition, functioned to highlight and resist social separation rooted in individual alienation from the finite, sensuous, material body. Furthermore, this historical duration and the bodily riposte examined therein, draw at-

19 Raunig, Art and Revolution, 192.

20 The longue durée framework serves as a methodological anchor for this inquiry. It is derived from Fernand Braudel’s historical method which he espoused as a means to counter a positivist approach to the study of history. I employ the longue durée approach due to its totalizing capacity. That is, as a means of accessing a particular social problem through a plural (rather than linear) approach to the unfolding of historical time, considering the relation and interrelation of various social, political and economic factors while also serving as a means to examine a particular social problem. It functions, as Braudel states, to “piece together a larger picture.” Fernand Braudel, “History and the Social Sciences: The Longue Durée,” in Review (Fernand Braudel Center), vol. 32, no, 2 (Commemorating the Longue Durée (December, 2009): 171-203, 176. For more on the longue durée also see Dale Tomich, “The Unfolding of Historical Time: The Longue Durée and Micro-History,” Almanack, no.2 Guarulhos (July/Dec. 2011): 52-65. http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/2236-463320110204.
tention, I argue, to a form of historical myopia, a *hamartia* or tragic substantial error that fuels this aforementioned historical recursion and regression, with which this corporeal estrangement is dialectically entwined. This dissertation, therefore, proposes that this modern *hamartia* has its foundations in a historically contingent individual alienation from the material body which it also exacerbates, reproducing the oppressive order of things, by obscuring an understanding of contemporary conditions within the historical emergence of a social totality.21

The *longue durée* proposed begins with the failed revolutions of 1848 in Europe, and its signalling of a repetitive and shortsighted modern revolutionary impulse, come tradition, ending in regression. It acts, within this inquiry, as a starting point for the observation of this modern *hamartia* which serves as the underlying frame of this study on the body within radical art practice as revolutionary praxis. The year 1848, specifically the events which transpired in France and inspired the spread of insurrection across most of Europe, represents a moment key to the instalment of capitalist hegemony and the obvious privileging of the preservation of market capitalism and bourgeois interests over the political project of equality.

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21 My understanding of “totality” throughout this text is indebted to György Lukács. Totality to Lukács refers to a set of social, cultural and economic elements which are interrelated in such a way that the essence of each is understood in relation to the others and to the whole. To Lukács, for example, the proletariat holds revolutionary potential because it is capable of grasping social totality while also viewing itself as both the subject and the object of that totality, and this precisely due to its reified state. For more on this see György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, translated by Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1971).
and freedom. It also crucially signalled the beginnings of the modern labour movement as the proletariat presented itself for the first time as a revolutionary class.  

By 1968, the impact of advanced industrialization, mass socio-economic shifts including economic and cultural imperialism, two brutal World Wars and withdrawal from communitarian practices (rise of the isolating nuclear family and decline in communal religiosity) was rising to the surface of the consciousness of both the individual and the collective. Furthermore in the 1960s in Europe, in the aftermath of the Holocaust and within the confines of repressive social and cultural norms, the body, as the ground zero of economic and political control, was pulled sharply into focus. The visceral nature of the action at the university of Vienna; the abject, communal, public spilling out of the body beyond its physical limits and socially imposed boundaries, denotes an act of manumission at a specific historical moment and within a historical cycle which saw the cultural, political and economic bondage of the body in the name of civility reach a breaking point. The body at this time declared itself as both the material upon which History comes to bear as well as capitalism’s limit.

The Actionists’ location within a matrix composed on the one hand of their geo-political specificity in postwar Austria and, on the other of their positions as the heirs of the art historical and aesthetico-political aims of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (itself sprung from the failures of 1848) and Vienna Secession, places them in a unique position at the intersection of a

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keenly felt historical tragedy manifest in the systematic mass extermination of European Jew-
ry, and of the Central European utopian aspirations of collective cohesion. Their work, as
radical assertions of the body’s materiality in relation to abstraction, both social and aesthet-
ic, and vis-à-vis social and cultural forces which contributed to a dematerialization of subjec-
tivity and thus to the erosion of social bonds, amounts to a collision between the material
body and aesthetic practice as political action. This text understands their work as an attempt
to call attention to the importance of the pre-social body and of embodiment to political
agency, especially within a modern political economy based on the body’s immiseration. As
such, their works would function as an unveiling of history’s repressive and divisive trajectory,
as well as acts of total refusal of existing conditions which that trajectory led to, thus pro-
viding a possibility for the suturing of fractured social bonds or, at the very least, for these
fractures to rise to collective consciousness. And this, through an exposure to the finite mate-
riality of the natural body; a materiality shared in common though experienced differently
due to cultural processes, which have deemed certain bodies as subordinate in relation to a
discursively constructed superior benchmark, and due to the divisive conditions set up by
capital.

Longue Durée and Immiseration

The point of initiation of our long century, in which a modern economic and social
reality, namely one of immiseration, was set in place, begins with a historical failure which
prompted both Karl Marx’s application of historical materialism to the events which tran-
spired in France in the 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte. It yielded the aesthetico-revolu-
tionary polemics of Richard Wagner which propounded the unifying potential and political potency of participation in a total art work, one which narrowed the gap between art and life through sensuous-aesthetic collective engagement. This duration ends in 1968, another year of global uprising which this project understands as a delayed reaction to the conditions set in place with 1848’s defeats. While the events of 1848 cannot all be painted with the same brush, each resulting from particular conditions depending on their specific geopolitical contexts, they were broadly motivated by the desire born of the European Enlightenment to establish more liberal and democratic modes of governance as well as greater political representation and equality in the eyes of the law, which would put an end to certain conditions of privilege experienced by the few at the expense of the greater population. Historian Eric Hobsbawm elaborates upon this in his text *Age of Capital* whereby he locates 1848 as marking the firm separation along class lines of the labouring poor and the bourgeoisie. Thus the backdrop of this inquiry is the consideration of the events of 1968 as a delayed reaction to the conditions set in place in the aftermath of 1848; those conditions being the usurping, by the bourgeois interest in capitalist accumulation, of the modern state’s mandate to govern according to the well-being of all citizens by whom and for whom it is constituted, as well as the reification of social relations caused by the ubiquitous nature of capital which relies upon the violent extraction of value from the productive forces of the body.

Their outburst and swift failures stand as moments of rupture and return, initiating a modern recursive historical cycle motivated by emancipatory desires. The connective tissue

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23 This study considers these years to be fluid in terms of their own *longue durées*. The events of 1848 stretched out into the early 1850s with 1848 remaining the watershed year. The same can be said of 1968 and the tension building up in the years leading up to it, and with the struggle for social and economic justice continuing into the 1970s depending on the specific geographical locations.
linking these two years lies in the installation of divisive and exploitative economic and political conditions, namely the privileging of capital’s growth and expansion, which by 1968 had colonized every aspect of daily life. Crucial to consider are the crystallization of class relations and division along a political axis in the aftermath of 1848. Furthermore, and germane to my suggestion of a modern *hamartia*, according to Karl Marx, the failed revolutions of 1848 in France were a farcical repetition of the Great Revolution of the previous century. In the *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, he laments the past’s haunting of the present, especially in moments of revolutionary crisis when its traditions are anxiously revived.\(^{24}\) Marx initiates his discussion of historical repetition and re-inscription of existing power structures by reviving another old ghost. He writes: “Hegel says somewhere that great historic facts and personages recur twice. He forgot to add ‘Once as tragedy, and again as farce’.”\(^{25}\) The irony is not lost considering Marx’s own reprisal of past discursive frameworks and their application to a study of historical myopia and repetition. The farce to which Marx was referring in his analysis of the events of 1848 was the revolution’s culmination in the absolute rule of yet another Napoleon; Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, Napoleon I’s nephew.

To Marx, 1848 was an aesthetic failure, in that it failed to realize the proletarian revolutionary project, itself an aesthetic project in that exploited productive forces were to “of themselves, accomplish the work of a liberation of the senses”\(^{26}\) ultimately leading to the col-

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\(^{24}\) In the *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Karl Marx says: “The tradition of all past generations weighs like an alp upon the brain of the living (…) at such very epochs of revolutionary crisis do they anxiously conjure up into service the spirits of the past.” (9).


\(^{26}\) Gandesha, “Three Logics of the Aesthetic in Marx”, 14.
lapse of capitalist society and solving the problem of representation characterizing the proletariat’s political impotence. This aesthetic project, thus, would have interrupted the historical repetition manifest in the rise of yet another Bonaparte and the rule of One.\textsuperscript{27} The term aesthetic in this case is intimately entwined with politics and to a particularly Central European discourse regarding the means by which to overcome the estrangement experienced within a modern condition that eroded human nature’s essentially communal inclination.\textsuperscript{28} It is a humanist ideal, “patterned after the cultural condition of an ancient Greece and was based on modern aesthetic concepts.”\textsuperscript{29} Furthermore, as an aesthetic failure, the events of 1848 were unsuccessful in establishing social and political institutions as products of the people’s own energies and based on a humanistic unity with nature and a collective condition.\textsuperscript{30} What resulted instead was the state emerging as a governing structure external to men, an authority from above as opposed to one resulting from quotidian social practice. This is exemplified by its deployment of both real and latent violence: real, as evidenced by the brutal crushing of citizen uprisings exemplified by the June Days in Paris and the defeat of the Hungarian revolution by Austrian forces in 1849, and latent in regard to the state’s tethering to capitalist interests. This usurpation of democratic freedom by capitalist interest also clinches these failures as aesthetic ones from a Marxist standpoint, as a capitalist mode of production causes further estrangement from nature, as nature is transformed into a product through labour and

\textsuperscript{27} Gandesha, “Three Logics of the Aesthetic in Marx,” 4.

\textsuperscript{28} Philip J. Kain, \textit{Schiller, Hegel, and Marx: State, Society, and the Aesthetic ideal of Ancient Greece}. (Montreal, Qc: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1982), 6-7 and 85-86.

\textsuperscript{29} Kain, \textit{Schiller, Hegel, and Marx}, 6-7.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 8.
placed within a relationship of exchange over which the worker has no control, further impeding his freedom.\textsuperscript{31} Additionally, according to Marx, the farcical character of its aesthetics of revolt also failed, as the throwing up of barricades in the spirit of French revolutionary tradition would not be successful in 1848. It would take more than a nationalistic visual and performative language of revolution to inspire militant fidelity to the cause, especially in the hearts of the bourgeoisie, for capitalism was much more advanced than it had been in 1789.\textsuperscript{32}

Consistent with a modern and Romantic Central European obsession with social separation, the events failed to achieve a model of governance based on equal representation and on principles of a sensuous-aesthetic humanism. Furthermore, the revolutions also reinstated imperial rule in France, failed to achieve national unity in Germany and restored imperial authority in Austria along with the implementation of absolutist reactionary policies by the early 1850s.\textsuperscript{33}

Underlying this inquiry is the observation of historical recursion (as evidenced most recently by the current rise in Right-wing populism) and the persistence of social separation, whether along class, racial or gender lines, in the wake of 1968’s own failures. Arguably, while daily comforts, conveniences and communications have increased or been facilitated by great technological innovations, the problem of estrangement is all the more imperceptible

\textsuperscript{31} Philip J. Kain describes the relationship between work and the aesthetic model as such: “Real freedom takes place outside of material production, in free time. It requires the shortening of the work day. This is freedom on the aesthetic model, the realm in which man finds the sort of activity that is an end in itself.” (\textit{Schiller, Hegel, and Marx}, 124).

\textsuperscript{32} Karl Marx, \textit{18th Brumaire}, 10-11.

\textsuperscript{33} Following the uprisings in March of 1848, the Austrian Reichstag, or first elected government was formed which lasted only a short time having little success except the abolition feudalism. It was quickly replaced by further constitutional reform favouring neo-absolutism under Emperor Franz Josef and centralized power in the Austrian-Empire.
than it had been in the 1960s, testifying to the enduring relevance of Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* (1967). Since 1968, with the gradual dematerialization of labour, thus the increased difficulty in registering capitalist exploitation on a corporeal level and the exacerbation of that impediment by increased standard of living, and in the midst of an out of control consumer culture and the increased mediation of social relations by digital interfaces, a consideration of the corporeal dimension of individual alienation and social fragmentation is perhaps more urgent than ever.

**Hamartia**

*Hamartia*, as per the quote cited at the opening of this introduction, has its roots in Aristotle’s understanding of Greek tragedy. It is defined within that context as an error resulting from the protagonist’s blindness to the totality of their circumstances, with their actions thus leading to a tragic result. This understanding of *hamartia* or fatal flaw, as the crux of Greek tragedy and as an error committed without ill intent, has evolved over time to take on a moral dimension. This is mainly due to its association with sinful nature in Pauline theology. The figure of Oedipus, from Sophocles’ tragedy bearing the same name, has most often been associated with *hamartia*. In an attempt to avoid fulfilling a prophecy which predicted that he would kill his father and enter into an incestuous relationship with his mother, Oedipus engages in a course of action which causes these events to come to pass. Importantly, the tragic error contains a historical or ancestral dimension, often sprung from violence, as

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a debt paid to the past. This may be responsible for *hamartia* later being attributed a sinful connotation and given a penitential dimension. Oedipus’s father Laius, in his youth, had kidnapped and raped Chrysippus, the son of King Pelops, who then committed suicide out of shame. Laius’ crime not only doomed him, but also his descendants to receiving punishment from the gods. After hearing the Oracle’s prediction that his son would murder him, Laius ordered the infant Oedipus’s death. Abandoned on a hilltop, left to die of exposure, the infant was found by a shepherd and adopted by the King of Corinth. Years later, while consulting the Oracle of Delphi as to the true identity of his parents, which had been placed in doubt by a drunkard who questioned his parentage, Oedipus received the same prophecy given to Laius. Desperate to avoid killing his father, Oedipus leaves Corinth for Thebes. On the road, Oedipus kills King Laius, his biological father, and defeats the Sphinx who was terrorizing the city, by solving the Sphinx’s riddle. Then, becoming King of Thebes, he marries the now widowed Queen Jocasta, unaware that she is his mother and thus ultimately fulfills the prophecy. Years later, when all is revealed, Jocasta commits suicide and Oedipus blinds himself by plunging pins into his eyes. Finally, the lesson learned from the tragic error is ultimately violent and crucially, tangled up with a past and the totality of a present condition to which the tragic hero had been blind.

The concept of *hamartia* is thus reflective of an inability to fully synthesize the totality of one’s circumstances in relation to history, making tragedy both ironic and the result of a historical blind spot. This figurative blindness is made very literal when Oedipus takes his own sight upon discovering the truth. This obscuration prevents the tragic hero from arriving at a full consciousness of their own circumstances; ignorance of the past results in an inabili-
ty to fully grasp the present and understand the stakes of one’s own actions, leading to repetition and the perpetuation of the cycle of tragedy. The fates of Oedipus’s children, or half brothers and sisters, may serve as an example of this recursive cycle.\textsuperscript{35}

The first issue to come to mind when considering the concept of \textit{hamartia} is the notion of free will. Does invoking this mythical concept, entwined with the notion of inevitable collision with past failures or mistakes, mean suggesting the absence of individual or collective agency? Quite simply, no. The question is not the absence of agency but rather its obstruction or perhaps its deferral. Without full awareness of the present conditions in relation to and within the total historical trajectory which led to them, agency becomes a slippery concept: action is taken in accordance with free will in relation to what is known, leaving the consequences at the mercy of that which has yet to be understood. There is a slippage between agency and determinism. Philologist Kurt Von Fritz discussed \textit{hamartia} as something that “objectively renders the tragic events tragic.”\textsuperscript{36} Fritz goes on to say that “the tragic situation always comes, is given, from outside, that is, it does not emerge with necessity from the character of the hero….the Hamartia that Aristotle talks about certainly belongs, as an always open possibility, to the fundamental condition of human existence.”\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Hamartia} is thus, not an issue of subjective moral guilt and is not reserved for the realm of the Greek stage alone,

\textsuperscript{35} His sons Eteocles and Polynices kill each other over the throne of Thebes, Antigone is sentenced to be locked in a tomb left to die for mourning her dead brother against King Creon’s orders and Ismene appears to escape the curse though eventually vanishes at the end of Sophocles’ plays, as though swept away in the tragic denouement of her family’s fate.


\textsuperscript{37} Ensslin, “From Hamartia to ‘Nothingness’,” 37-37.
but rather derives from what is understood to be an ontological truth, one which Greek tragedy, as one side of the coin of public engagement at the dawn of Western democracy’s inception, sought to expose as a matter of civic obligation.38

Hamartia demonstrates a dialectical pull within the tragic hero, between reason and myth, a condition which mirrors the form of this text. The protagonist uses rational thought to act in accordance with what his consciousness tells him is true, while it appears that unseen greater forces are behind his undoing.39 However, this tension between agency and powerlessness is of the protagonist’s own creation. Powerlessness and the conviction to act in accordance with the greater good, seem to be the very thing which prevents the protagonist from attaining his goal. Oedipus’s downfall is not caused by the oracle’s foresight, but rather by his unwavering desire to avoid the oracles’ prediction that blinds him to any possibilities other than his own rationalized course of action. Staunch adherence to irrational and uninformed beliefs regarding his parentage, prevents Oedipus from becoming fully conscious of the full reality of his circumstances. In other words, hamartia stems from a misunderstanding, or the neglect of crucial information, thus leading to a course of action in accordance with one’s own rationalization of the given circumstances.

38 It is crucial for the reader to keep in mind that Greek tragedy rose to prominence at the same time as democracy in Ancient Athens and were inextricably intertwined. Attendance and participation in the theatre was a matter of civic duty. Art served a crucial public and thus political function. This makes Wagner’s insistence on the political function of art clearer in terms of art’s historical association to democratic process and social cohesion.

39 And by mythical I do not mean a particular story or allegory which features a form of hamartia as part of its plot line but rather the notion of a held belief that is in actuality not true. It is worth reminding the viewer that myth also refers to a view of historical events which have been deployed to shape people’s world view or belief system. The concept therefore holds religious or spiritual meaning.
Within Christian theology, the Aristotelian notion of the tragic error takes on a new direction, and comes to be inextricably associated with the body. At the opening of this discussion on *hamartia*, I mentioned the term’s association with sin within Pauline theology. While the literary or mythological notion of *hamartia* exonerates the protagonist of guilt due to his actions being motivated by a state of “false consciousness”\(^\text{40}\) or to a historical blind spot, the Pauline connotation implies a primordial guilt, intimately tied to the flesh. In his essay “Sarx and Sin in Pauline Theology”, Eugene J. Cooper outlines a Pauline understanding of sin by excavating the use of the term *hamartia*, specifically its relation to the flesh. He says: “It is not the usage of the term *hamartia* for single sinful actions which are primary in the Pauline Writings, but these lists of single sinful actions are regarded by Paul as proceeding from a fundamental, interior disposition of a life *according to the flesh*, as the source of the *works of the flesh.*”\(^\text{41}\) Man’s sinful disposition, as Cooper points out, also stems from the past. It begins with Adam and Eve’s sin in the garden of Eden. This inherited sinful nature, or concupiscence, operates from within and “exercises its power over man through the weakness of the flesh (*sarx*)… The use of the term *hamartia* to the sinful nature of man refers to the fact that man is in the condition of *sarx*, of the flesh, and is determined by the power of sin (*hamartia*) through his *sarx*.\(^\text{42}\) This inherited nature of *hamartia*, as well as its location within the body, lends it a historical, ancestral dimension much like the Greek understanding,

\(^{40}\) I borrow the term “false consciousness” from György Lukács. It was also taken up later by Herbert Marcuse and Guy Debord who both wrote within the context of the rising tensions of the 1960s. It refers to an inability to properly perceive the full scope of one’s conditions due to the economic and social conditions imposed by capitalism.

\(^{41}\) Cooper, “Sarx and Sin in Pauline Theology,” 244.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 245.
while also contributing to an anxiety towards the sinful body within the individual subject: a cleaving which precedes that of the Cartesian split. The social and historical weight of this is crucial considering St-Paul’s role in shaping Christian doctrine and the impact Christianity has had in the development of modern Western politics and collective consciousness. This impact has been registered by philosopher Alain Badiou who, in *St-Paul and the Foundations of Universalism* (2003), offers an interpretation of St-Paul as a true revolutionary subject — one whose militant adherence to a universal truth brought about by the experience of an aleatory event (his vision on the road to Damascus), compelled him to struggle relentlessly for a new world order. Also, and critical to this study which correlates alienation from body and historical recursion, it is evident that from the very beginnings of the institutionalization of Christianity, that the body is deemed a conduit through which man’s sinful nature, or *hamartia*, operates.

While both the Aristotelian and Pauline interpretations of *hamartia* differ greatly, there are some similarities. Firstly, there is a shift from an objective to a subjective ‘threat’ in the jump to Pauline theology. However, the ancestral or inherited nature of *hamartia* is maintained. Also, both relate to some form of determinism; on the one hand, in the face of a blindness to the totality of one’s circumstance which causes a slippage between acting out of one’s own free-will and the inevitable reoccurrence of the cause, and on the other hand because the “foothold of sin in man is in his *sarx*” or body, which makes *hamartia* an in-

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43 This repetition of the cleaving of the subject from body exemplified by the Cartesian split, only re-inscribes the myths that Enlightenment sought to dispel. In itself, this discursive repetition exemplifies *hamartia*. 
escapable force one is continually struggling to avoid. This moral recoiling from body has permeated Western culture, causing a fissure within the subject and thus an alienation from a crucial aspect of the self and of the collective social and political body.

In this exegesis of *hamartia*’s trajectory within western discourse, both religious and philosophical, the intention is to lay the ground from which we can draw its potential as theoretical device for the understanding of the political stakes of corporeal alienation and collective estrangement. Its import lies in its articulation as a fundamental part of the human condition, as an impediment to man’s full and informed agency due to an ignorance of the totality of one’s condition *face a l’histoire*, and which, in this study, can be used to scaffold an inquiry into social separation and historical recursion. It is in this exegesis that a genealogy of *hamartia*’s applicability to the individual as well as to the collective becomes clear. That is, while its portrayal in the Athenian drama is centred on the individual *hamartia*, its purpose, within a nascent democracy in which participation was part of civic duty, was to convey such blind spots or errors as part of a collective condition of existence. Within the Christian context, this individual and collective character is maintained in its reference to a sinful nature lodged within the individual flesh, a fleshly materiality shared among members of the collective.

44 Cooper, “*Sarx* and Sin in Pauline Theology,” 255. Also, in Pauline writing, before God’s enfleshing in Christ, man lived the life *kata sarka*, or according to the flesh. He was redeemed of that due to Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross. However, man’s sinful nature, because of his flesh, continues to subject him to the possibility of living the life *kata sarka* which would be a reflection of his own weakness and equate to a rejection of Christ, thus a mortal sin.

45 With this, I do not intend to dismiss the impact class, race, gender identification and sexual orientation have had on people’s lived experience in terms of their oppression within a white and masculinist culture. I am however calling attention to the historical processes which caused these disparities which are all, fundamentally, grounded in body, whether sexual difference, skin colour or the exploitation of labour.
This text invokes the term *hamartia* to approach a historical cycle of rupture and regression, this aforementioned recursive history, that has led to the maintenance of dominant oppressive power structures and as a result to an increased state of individual and collective fragmentation. This recursive history can be understood as a structural repetition of resistance against politically and culturally repressive conditions arising against different historical backgrounds. As such, this recursion slips from consciousness as does the increasingly alienated state of the individual and fragmented state of the collective. This dialectical pull between repetition and increased fragmentation appears much like the psychoanalytical repetitive chain theorized by Jacques Lacan through the concepts of *tuché* and *automaton*. This concept of traumatic repetition, whereby *tuché* appears as the cause or failed encounter with the Real that is constantly repeated, and *automaton* being the fractured consciousness fuelling the repetitive chain, as applied to the present study and the question of recursive his-

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46 In 1962, Otto Muehl makes allusions to this cycle of rupture and regression in his text *Aspekte einer Totalrevolution* saying: “Just look at the revolutions of history, how the wilder revolutionaries, as soon as their enemies were blown away, immediately become proper and put on their slippers. Or just look at the proletarian revolutions: once the resistance is gone, they are already bourgeois-ified.” Here Muehl appears to be critical of the appeasement of revolutionary impetus however without acknowledging the structural and material conditions which force its retreat. (See Raunig, *Art and Revolution*, fn 18. p. 290).
tory, will be further unpacked in Chapter I.\textsuperscript{47} While Lacan’s model pertains to individual trauma, I apply it to the collective as suffering from a historically contingent wounding manifest in social fragmentation and rooted in individual alienation from the body. A trauma which can be mapped onto the dialectical movement of history which account for the cyclical model of history proposed as well as my longue durée approach. Considering this, the following text examines the Actionists’ outburst as a response to the unfinished business of history, and this through their inheritance of a Central European discourse pertaining to the potential of a sensuous-aesthetic humanism to counter an alienating modern condition. It is made especially visible in their inheritance of a mythical form of Viennese Modernism itself informed by Wagnerian aesthetic totalization and deployed to counter social fragmentation. This aesthetic lineage itself testifies to the cyclical return of unresolved historical wounds through a recursive reference, on the part artists in Vienna specifically, to the aesthetic mean by which to heal them. The Actionists’ radical performances, which provided an exposure of and to a shared and finite material truth which precedes inscription, I argue, called attention

\textsuperscript{47} Robert Harari, \textit{Lacan’s Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: An Introduction}, translated by Judith Filc (New York, NY: The Other Press, 2004), 84. Also see Jacques Lacan, “Tuché and Automaton” in \textit{Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis}. Translated by Alan Sheridan, Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co, 1981). Also for recursion in media studies see Geoffrey Winthrop Young, "Siren Recursions." \textit{Kittler Now: Current Perspectives in Kittler Studies}. Ed. Stephen Sale and Laura Salisbury. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015). 71-94. The model of recursion I propose differs from that espoused within the context of Media studies whereby “recursion involves repetitive instances of self-processing that nonetheless produce something different” (74). This implies a certain productivity to recursion, as exemplified by Markus Krajewski’s drawing of a structural correlation between eighteenth century domestic servants and present day electronic servers. This model of recursion is mapped onto the progress of technology, whereby even the living body and organic functions anticipate future iterations by technological means. Furthermore, Krajewski’s understanding of recursion as involving both prolepsis and analepsis, anticipatory flashes forward and flashes back, implies a privileged viewpoint, one which my model of recursion is lacking in terms of a historical blind spot. This blind spot or \textit{hamartia}; a historically contingent wound stemming from the state’s monopoly on violence, whether real or latent, in terms of fostering capitalist exploitation for example, thus functions as the engine of a recursive history.
to this historically contingent alienation from the body. By attempting to create a space for an encounter with the Real, their work disrupted and threatened reality in a manner which would facilitate an individual and collective raising of consciousness, amounting to a violent refusal of the dominant order and of the history which shaped it.

This inquiry is divided into three parts: History, Myth and The Worker Body. Its form thus mirrors the dialectical tension within modern political discourse as well as the failures of both Enlightenment and Romanticism’s views of democratic values, inspired by a shortsighted fetishization of antiquity, itself a symptom of hamartia, as a means to repair collective fracture. While Enlightenment sought the reparation of social separation through civilizing, rational and democratic processes, Romanticism’s retort was a form of sensuous humanism seeking the re-naturalization of man through the myth of the unified nation. Both are based in an uncritical historical reach backwards, as lamented by Jean-Luc Nancy, which failed to overcome the dictatorship of capitalist accumulation, the basis for a modern condition of alienation and social fracture.

In the Inoperative Community, Jean-Luc Nancy writes: “The gravest and most painful testimony of the modern world, the one that possibly involves all other testimonies to which this epoch must answer … is the dissolution, the dislocation or the conflagration of community.”48 He argues that modern political thought and practice has sought, as a basis for governance, to recapture the egalitarian ethos of lost originary communities, examples of which are the Athenian city-state and the early Christian community. However, as Nancy suggests,

one need only investigate those early examples, to realize that the supposed confraternity of these bygone eras never actually existed. Nevertheless, despite their intention of inculcating greater individual freedom and civility, modern political projects whose tactics included colonial expansion, economic and ideological imperialism and the promotion of Eurocentric Christian culture, has led to greater social separation with which the contemporary moment must come to terms. Nancy’s thoughts on community also provide support for the previous discussion of *hamartia* in relation to the impossibility of community within existing conditions and the West’s insistence to achieve it as a political project. That is, the fact that modern political thought’s longing for a lost fraternal community is erroneous, or symptomatic of an uncritical look to the past as said community is nothing but a fabrication, testifies to a misreading of history being part and parcel of modern Western politics. Here, some common threads can be identified between Marx’s allusion to the repeated “conjuring up of old ghosts” in moments of political unrest, Aristotle’s “substantial error” as being tied to a blindness to totality and Nancy’s examination of modern political thought’s erroneous fetishization of a political past and repeated attempts to recapture it. There is therefore a dialectical relationship between repetition and the misreading of history. The lack of attention paid to a historical totality has contributed to the repetition of cycles of domination in terms of class (and disregard for racial and gender discrimination), whereby the priorities and property of the few have taken precedence over the needs of the many, thus negating the original mandate of the modern state, and leading to the gradual erosion of the value placed on individual life as a result.
Ironically, in light of this economic disparity, the trajectory of the modern state is itself a recursion. Its emergence in 1848, as an external authority, is in itself a reprisal of older models of governance and power dynamics. The state’s protection of capitalist interests demonstrates that, despite the eradication of bloodline monarchies, the unequal balance of power remains or is repeated, albeit in a different form, with the accumulation of wealth remaining a political priority despite the shift in the means by which material needs are acquired. This repetition is part of this proposed modern recursive cycle, fuelled by hamartia or an inability to consider history in its totality nor the contemporary condition in relation to it, and this, especially in moments of crisis. The present moment can serve as a reminder of this recursive cycle as less than a century after National Socialism, the world is witnessing the rise of neoliberal populism and the extreme Right, following a severe economic downturn, an unparalleled refugee crisis and the rise of a (racialized) terrorist threats. In other words, this disregard for totality has ensured that any action taken in a moment of crisis has resulted in the perpetuation of a historical cycle ruled by a limited form of consciousness.

This text’s understanding of consciousness is indebted to György Lukács. In History and Class Consciousness, he locates the revolutionary quality of a Marxist proletarian science in the point of view of totality, in its “dynamic understanding of the whole.” He says: “Only in this context, which sees the isolated facts of social life as aspects of the historical

49 In the 18th Brumaire, Marx says this of 1848: “Instead of society itself having conquered a new point, only the State appears to have returned to its oldest form, to the simply brazen rule of the sword and the club.” (11).

process and integrates them in a totality, can knowledge of the facts hope to become knowledge of reality."\(^{51}\) Lukács argues that it is the proletariat’s unique ability to view its own position within a historical whole, and its interrelating parts, which lends it its revolutionary potential. It is in the mass realization that the working class is both the subject and object of a capitalist mode of production, that revolutionary class consciousness can be achieved. Within the context of the present inquiry, this notion must be pushed further as there are other oppressive forces which have contributed to the erosion of agency, forces that extend beyond issues of class, and which capitalism inherited. For example, Lukács’s Marxist approach does not account for the exploitation and marginalization experienced by people for reasons other than their class position. Here, I am referring to marginalization due to gender, queer identities and race.\(^{52}\) This underlines the fact that a view of the totality of historical processes would be more thorough through the eyes of a person who occupies a subject position at the intersection of multiple levels of oppression. This point will become clearer through the works of VALIE EXPORT in Chapter Three. However, the same phenomena, namely Christianity’s doctrines regarding the fleshly body and Enlightenment’s subordination of body to mind, which caused forms of oppression in relation to bodily difference (race and gender), have contributed alongside a capitalist mode of production, to alienation from an individual

\(^{51}\) Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness* as Quoted by Martin Jay, 104.

materiality held in common which this text argues to be the ground zero of collective frag-
mentation.

**Historicity**

This above outlined tragic error, or *hamartia*, as well as historical recursion will serve
as the narrative frame of the following inquiry into the work of the Vienna Actionists within
the *longue durée* of the 1848 revolutions leading up to the events of 1968. The questions re-
main then; in terms of an investigation into a collective malaise, why examine 1848 and why
radical, bodily works of the Vienna Actionists in a period leading up to another year of upris-
ings? The answer lies in the ways in which, within that long century, politics and the body
intersect; where the body as the material upon which History is registered and History, “pre-
sumed to be the unshakeable support of any politics whatsoever,” renders the body the ful-
crum of any investigation of rupture within the social and political body. In order to examine
the phenomenon that was Actionism (and I say phenomenon to convey the work as represent-
ing an impulse, a compulsion towards the concrete in the midst of the primacy of abstraction,
both real and aesthetic, with any sort of gravitas), it is crucial to excavate it within the con-
text of its relation to a historical whole. This will allow for an understanding of Actionism,
not solely as an isolated instance of aesthetic rebellion, but as a political act against alien-
ation, as a form of procedural violence deployed against the long established order of things.
The importance of historicity to this inquiry is the reason why its beginnings extend beyond
the period bracketed by end of World War II and the Cold War climate of the 1950s and 60s

leading up to the events of 1968. It must begin much earlier to grasp how revolution, the body and art practice intersect as a particularly modern phenomenon. It is the reason for which this inquiry begins in 1848, a crucial moment in the development of the West and the role of the modern bourgeois state. Furthermore, it is a moment equally critical from an art historical standpoint, in terms of the development of Realism in painting as a means to truthfully convey contemporary conditions and as it pertains to Romantic aesthetic theory considering the influence of Wagner’s work which sprung from this very moment of revolutionary failure.

In *The Century*, Alain Badiou suggests an alternative model of history through an analysis of the twentieth century, which veers away from conventional models of temporal progression. Badiou’s twentieth century is a short one, spanning seventy-five years, and is defined by war and violence, or by destruction through which a definitive beginning would arise. This century is bookended by World War I and the collapse of the Soviet Union, fuelled by the desire to create a “new man” and ultimately defined by the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis and political projects motivated by economic gain. Within this model, History does not unfold according to the linear passing of years but as a series of events which denote a paradigm, in this case, that of violence and totalitarianism.

I propose a similar methodological approach to History. It is a century resembling what Badiou refers to as Trotsky’s formulation, that is, the eruption of the masses onto the stage of history whereby the “the categories of revolution, proletariat and fascism all refer to figures of massive irruption, to potent collective representations.”54 It is important to keep in

mind that the stage upon which this history unfolded is that of the rise of the bourgeois state, whose power was based on the extraction of value from labouring bodies. The intimate ties between the state, the masses and the individual body is thus the connective tissue of this long century. A connective tissue made brutally evident in the völkish nationalism of Nazi Germany which centred upon the superiority of the Aryan body, tasked to labour for the glory of the Fatherland.

The argument to follow will present the events of 1848 as being the catalyst for specific political and aesthetic discourses, springing from revolution and expressing the desire to repair fragmentation within the collective social body whether along class lines (Marx) or in terms of Nationhood (Wagner). This study proposes the events of a long 1968, a moment of global unrest, protest, raised collective consciousness and mass movements resisting political repression and an alienating capitalist consumer culture, as a delayed reaction to the political and economic conditions crystallized with the failures of 1848.\footnote{For more on a global perspective on 1968 see Timothy S. Brown, “1968. Transnational and Global Perspectives,” in Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte, version: 1.0, (11.06.2012), http://dx.doi.org/10.14765/zzf.dok.2.272.v1. I say “long 1968” to denote that this inquiry considered not only the protest activities and events of that year, but the discontent leading up to it in the 1960s and lingering into the 1970s. Furthermore, in examining the work of the Actionists in relation to 1968, the reader should consider a moment of global disruption against the state and oppressive conditions, rather than placing the year in geo-political isolation in relation to Austria or France. Also, the present study understands 1968 within an even greater totality as it relates to the civil rights and feminist movements of the period. Conditions of inequality based on the body as a site of difference pre-date 1848, however the date nevertheless applies from a materialist point of view and in terms of the crystallization of state and capitalist interests which further disenfranchised women and people of colour.} I argue throughout this text, that the Actionists' work highlights the corporeal imperative to emancipation from a capitalist political economy and from the state which ensures the optimal conditions for its continued growth. Considering this, and their work’s dialogue with, and resistance against painting’s
modernist trajectory, this inquiry proposes that the Actionists’ work be considered a total re-

fusal of both real and formal abstraction, whose respective development mirror each other

within the *longue durée* proposed; the abstraction of value from the labouring body and the

slow dissolution of the figure in painting. Both, also reflect another abstraction — one that

is present in the dematerialization of subjectivity under the weight of the Cartesian split.


1848-1968 Triumph of Capital

The events of 1848 in France began as a cross-class alliance between the bourgeoisie and the working class, against the absolutism of the French Citizen King Louis Philippe during the February uprising of that year. Upon the king’s abdication, the Second Republic was proclaimed. Notably, and crucial to the history of proletarian struggle, the bourgeois provisional government enacted universal male suffrage and attempted to alleviate mass unemployment among the working class with the opening of the National Workshops. Louis Blanc, a socialist reformer who, in the wake of the February 1848 uprising, was made member of the Provisional government and was finally in a position to implement his ideas on labour reform. His intentions were “to establish in the name of the State and with State funds, workshops which would guarantee employment, regulate wages and satisfy the needs of the workman.”

However, the Provisional government placed the administration of the work-

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56 Formal abstraction here refers to a move away from representational language in the visual arts, in painting and sculpture especially. Real abstraction refers to the abstract value allotted to commodities and money’s ability to reconcile qualitatively incommensurable objects through the process of exchange as well as the social relations stemming from that exchange. In each case, the body, whether as the figure or labour, are rendered invisible.

shops in the hands of Blanc’s political adversary, Pierre Marie de St-Georges, who became the Minister of Public Works. The workshops were a failure. In fact, Alphonse de Lamartine, the Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1848 wrote in Part II of his *Histoire de la Révolution de Février*:

> A great Ministry of Public Works would have opened the era of a policy adequate to the situation. It was one of the greatest mistakes of the Government to have deferred too long the realization of these ideas. While it waited, the National Workshops, swollen by misery and idleness, became, day-by-day, slacker, more fruitless and menacing to the public peace. At that moment they were not so. They were only an expedient adopted in the interests of public order, and a first attempt of public assistance (une ébauche d’assistance publique), called into existence the day after the Revolution by the necessity of feeding the people, and not keeping it in idleness, so as to avoid the disorders which idleness brings about. M. Marie organized them with great insight, but without utility for productive work.  

The workshops were, therefore, nothing more than an apparatus of control, implemented to maintain a certain social order among the labouring poor. Instead of providing actual employment for every worker, the workshops appeared to simply function as a means for the bourgeois class to appease its former allies in the February uprising. In June 1848, dissatisfied with the provisional government’s failure to fulfill their promise to provide employment

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58 Ferdinand LaSalle, “The French National Workshops of 1848.”
[https://www.marxists.org/archive/lassalle/1906/04/workshops-1848.htm](https://www.marxists.org/archive/lassalle/1906/04/workshops-1848.htm).
for every worker, the working class of Paris rose up in what Alexis de Tocqueville called “the most extensive and most singular insurrection that has occurred in our history.” The proletarian uprising was crushed by the bourgeois government, which left 10,000 dead or injured while thousands of revolutionaries were deported to Algeria. The bourgeoisie, who previously began as a revolutionary class in the days of the Great Revolution, failed to maintain its commitment to its democratic ideals. The betrayal of the working class marked the moment when the revolutionary impulse which had united classes against oppressive rulership in February of 1848, was usurped by the bourgeoisie’s increased conservatism and its own concern for the maintenance of its material conditions; that is, to conduct business and capitalize on wage labour. Thus, 1848 marked a turning point in history, one especially significant to Marxist historiography as it represents the moment of initiation of the “global triumph of capitalism” as the “major theme of history in the decades following.” It also represents a two-fold betrayal. Firstly, the bourgeoisie’s betrayal of its status as a revolutionary class which it gained during the Great Revolution as well as its own aspirations of democratic universality. Secondly, its betrayal of the proletariat, its allies from the February Republic in the June Days of 1848. Karl Marx, in *The Class Struggle in France: 1848-1850* says:

The February Republic was won by the workers with the passive support of the bourgeoisie. The proletarians rightly regarded themselves as the victors of

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60 For more on the significance of 1848 in relation to the installation of capitalism see Karl Marx, *18th Brumaire* (1897) and Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital* (1995).

February, and they made the arrogant claims of victors. They had to be vanquished in the streets, they had to be shown that they were worsted as soon as they did not fight with the bourgeoisie, but against the bourgeoisie. Just as the February Republic, with its socialist concessions, required a battle of the proletariat, united with the bourgeoisie, against the monarchy, so a second battle was necessary to sever the republic from socialist concessions, to officially work out the bourgeois republic as dominant. The bourgeoisie had to refute, arms in hand, the demands of the proletariat. And the real birthplace of the bourgeois republic is not the February victory; it is the June defeat.62

Thus, 1848, stands as the moment when the protection of capitalist interests became a matter of state. It opened the door for capitalism as a system of “indirect governance” whereby political institutional frameworks function to provide support for market growth.63 Subsequently, it serves as a nodal point for the crystallization of social separation along class lines.64

This revolutionary impetus initiated in France quickly spread to Germany, motivated by a desire for greater national unity. In the Austrian Empire, unrest was caused by a desire for constitutional and liberal reform, and fervent nationalism and division within the diverse

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64 In the 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, Karl Marx says: “True enough the defeat of the June insurgents prepare, level the group, upon which the bourgeois republic could be founded and erected…it revealed the fact that here the Bourgeois republic mean the unbridled despotism of one class over another…’society is saved as often as the circle of its ruling class is narrowed, as often as a more exclusive interest asserts itself over the general.” (15-16).
Habsburg territories. The failures of these revolutionary efforts impacted the Germanic and Central European cultural landscape and notions of national identity well into the twentieth century, as evidenced by the widely influential polemics and operas of Richard Wagner, whose theories on the political role of the Gesamtkunstwerk were directly related to his involvement in, and disenchantment with the failed revolutions in both France and Germany.

While Marx’s *18 Brumaire* offers a materialist examination of the events in France and their impact on the proletariat, Wagner’s *Art and Revolution* and *The Artwork of the Future* extol the revolutionary potential of the totalization of the arts in the wake of the social and political failures of 1848. Both, however, fundamentally address concerns about capitalism’s role in impeding social cohesion. Indeed, Wagner’s “romantic anti-capitalism” was rooted in a historical reach backwards to the aesthetico-political role of the Athenian drama as civic religion, and the loss of that communal ideal within Christian modernity. He would deploy this nostalgic vision of the total art work as a new myth of German nationalism, articulated through the experience of the epic musical drama, and which “would provide the content for a new social religion of the future.” It is precisely the consequences of the bourgeoisie’s self-betrayal, decried by Marx in the *18th Brumaire*, which Wagner sought to address through art as a means to suture a fragmented body politic. However, Wagner’s mythology, mirroring

65 This will be further unpacked in Chapter I.


“the iconic world of a crumbling Empire… and the aggressive dream symbols of the new German boom”\textsuperscript{68} and his work, as a product and reflection of a nineteenth century bourgeois culture industry, can partially account for his co-option by Nazi ideology and subsequent dismissal as fascistic.\textsuperscript{69}  In his text \textit{In Search Wagner} from 1930, Theodor Adorno alludes to Wagner being a product of his (bourgeois) time and cultural conditions, his work signalling the beginnings of the culture industry, which allowed his aesthetics to be appropriated by the facile formal language, or kitsch, of the Nazi propaganda machine. He says: “In the midst of liberal culture the aim was to set up a cultural monopoly; the taint of this sullies the purity of Wagner’s criticism of the commercialization of the arts.”\textsuperscript{70} Adorno’s criticism is in the privatization, or commodification of Wagner’s vision, making it complicit in a culture which he criticized; the idea that his operas “tend to become commodities” in that, per Adorno, they adopt the formal law of the commodity-form in their seeming occultation of production.\textsuperscript{71}


\textsuperscript{69} See Theodor Adorno, \textit{In Search of Wagner}, Translated by Rodney Livingstone (London, U.K.: Verso Books, 1991). Also see John Deathridge, “Review: In Search of Wagner by Theodor Adorno,” \textit{19th Century Music}, vol 7, no.1 (Summer, 1983), 81-85. In this text, originally written in the 1930s, Adorno attempts to wrest Wagner’s reputation away from an entanglement with National Socialism. He however does view Wagner as signalling the beginning of high culture’s decline into kitsch, or the binding of the commodity with the work of art, with the Gesamtkunstwerk as its medium. John Deathridge says: “Wagner’s (Gesamtkunstwerk) pretends to be aware of the social evil it disguises and thereby creates an alibi for itself which, instead of helping to abolish the evil, actually intensifies it” (82) In this way, it appears that Adorno is pointing to Wagner’s own blind spot, whereby in his attempt to suture broken social ties along the lines of this bourgeois split originating in 1848, Wagner nevertheless left himself and his work vulnerable to the “sinister forces of history.” (81).

\textsuperscript{70} Theodor Adorno, \textit{In Search of Wagner}, 141.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 84 and 90. See the chapter titled \textit{Phantasmagoria} for more on Adorno’s comparison of Wagner’s operas to the commodity-form due to what he refers to as phantasmagoria (which he relates to the Gesamtkunstwerk), the same term Marx uses to discuss commodity fetishism. See p. 85, ft 1.
Crucial to this inquiry, in terms of the *longue durée* proposed, this failure set the stage for the installation of the now dominant social and political dynamics in the West. That is, the maintenance of an exploitative political economy, which profits from the extraction of value from the productive forces of the body and imposes a slavery to the wage, emerged as a chief matter of political, even democratic concern. In short, the result of the failed revolution was the establishment of the state as an external apparatus of domination, or “engine of class despotism”\(^{72}\) instead of one made by and for the people, as well as democratic politic’s shift in mandate toward providing the infrastructure and institutional framework necessary for the preservation of capitalist interests, solidifying a deep divide within the body politic along class lines. Key here is the correlation between the instrumentalization of bodies, social separation and political agency. That is, the impasse towards emancipation presented by a political economy which reifies social relations and forces one to participate in one’s own oppression. Additionally, the state’s monopoly on violence (an extension of the extrinsic nature of it authority), made abundantly clear with the Holocaust, the Bomb and its various examples of disciplining tactics directed against civic protests throughout the 1960s, casts doubt on the possibility of any political articulation of social cohesion.\(^{73}\) The spirit of 1968, its uprisings, activism and strikes, sought a solution to this inherited and matured state of social separation


\(^{73}\) The quelling of uprisings throughout the 1960s, be it the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago, the Tlateloco massacre in Mexico City, the race riots of the 1960s or the events in Paris in 1968, all demonstrate that the State and its institutions (police, federal agencies) reserved the right to violently maintain law and order.
exacerbated by what was by then a more specialized, mechanized mode of production and thus, an increasingly divisive existence under capital.

**Historical Materialism and Painterly Realism**

Historical materialism, a methodological approach to history developed by Karl Marx, contends that the movement of History, its great developments and events, is determined by mankind’s means of acquiring the material needs for the maintenance and reproduction of life. Friedrich Engels added that History is understood retrospectively, as a final result of the concatenation of individual wills and intersecting forces of which historical events are the result. However, the forces of historical development have largely been dictated by the individual wills of the few, who claimed absolute power while determining the means by which the many secured their material needs for subsistence, whether through rights to land, exchange of service or waged labour. Only in certain instances are the wills of absolute power disrupted, allowing for drastic alteration to material conditions. For example, the Black Death of the fourteenth century annihilated close to two-thirds of Europe’s population, thus disrupting the obligations imposed by a feudal system due to the high demand for labour power in relation to its very low supply. Another example is the French Revolution, which put an end to absolute monarchy in France. Slowly, the primacy of exchange and the hitching of capitalist interests to politics meant that the ebb and flow of historical events came to be dictated by the general equivalent which, in the form of the wage emerged as the

dominant means by which society is structured, crucially one independent of man and bearing down upon the labouring body. The consequences of these conditions, the weight of that social reality, is reflected in painting in Gustave Courbet’s realism, for example, which at the time was a leftist affront to the period’s aesthetic exigencies imposed by academic conventions and the French salon system. Perhaps his most well known works, A Burial at Ornans and The Stone Breakers both from 1849, monumentalize the laideur and the harsh realities of the everyday life of France’s labouring poor. This desire for an aesthetic language representative of concrete reality at a time of revolt is also present in the works of the Actionists leading up to 1968. However, their realism would require paint and canvas to give way to the body’s unmediated materiality. Actionism, in its act of total refusal of existing conditions and of one of its most prized cultural manifestations, painting, whose stifling constraints were narrowed further with the supremacy of the gesture in the wake of Pollock, abandoned traditional means of representation, or mediation of reality, in favour of the immediacy of the body.

The following chapters will examine the cultural, intellectual and economic currents which have shaped a Western modern condition and which have eroded the worth and political import attributed to individual lives manifest in a dematerialization of subjectivity: Christianity’s disciplining of the body, Enlightenment’s subordination of the body to the superiority of the mind and capitalism’s exploitation of labour. Crucially, the entirety of this text considers, hence the longue durée proposed, the fragmentation caused by capitalism’s dominance over political process and its gradual colonization of everyday life, as well as the mirroring of its oppressive conditions in painting. Also, the unique geo-political and historical context of the Actionists in postwar 1960s Austria is unpacked along with the greater post-
fascist Cold War climate of the 1950s and 60s, which saw the growth of consumer culture and advanced technological society. Herbert Marcuse, in *The One Dimensional Man* (1964), argued that advanced industrial society’s democratic unfreedom, characterized by the creation of false needs and the further enslavement of the worker to a positivist irrational rationality, only exacerbated impediments to liberation which would require a consciousness of servitude.\(^{75}\) This inability to conceptualize one’s own oppression under capital due to an inability to view the total historical scope of those oppressive conditions, discussed by György Lukács in the 1930s as “false consciousness,” was taken up by Guy Debord and the Situationist International in the 1960s and given visual expression as the Spectacle to account for capitalism’s colonization of everyday life through the proliferation of images. The Spectacle is thus not a simple collection of images but rather a “social relation, among people, mediated by images.”\(^{76}\) Crucially, as Thesis 29 points out, the Spectacle is the language of abstraction and social separation.

The modern spectacle expresses the totality of the loss of unity in the world: the abstraction of all specific labour and the general abstraction of the entirety of production are perfectly rendered in the spectacle, whose

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\(^{75}\) Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1991), 7. Furthermore, Marcuse says this about man’s enslavement to established rationality in advanced technological society (technological Reason): “To the degree to which they correspond to the given reality, thought and behaviour express a false consciousness, responding to and contributing to the preservation of a false order of facts. And this false consciousness has become embodied in the prevailing technical apparatus which in turn reproduces it.” (145)

mode of being concrete is precisely abstraction. The spectacle is the common language of separation.77

These repressive conditions as well as the critical discourse surrounding them came sharply into focus in 1968, a period which saw an escalation of protests and resistance against the institutions responsible for, and conditions resulting from, the above mentioned historical trajectory. Broadly speaking, while many social victories arose out of 1968, especially in relation to feminist struggle and the civil rights movement, politically the exercise was a failure. Meaning it did very little to dismantle the stronghold of an exploitative capitalist political economy that lays at the roots of oppression within the modern democratic state, and which inherited and capitalized on already existing forms of inequality such as those based on gender and race. While various protests, student uprisings and working class offensives sprung up across the globe, their common thread being resistance against repressive conditions imposed by the state, this emancipatory drive eventually conceded to the dominant order it was resisting (the uprisings of 1968 in France for example led to the re-election of Charles de

Gaulle) resulting in further strengthening of the bourgeois state, loss of confidence in collective action and even the depoliticization of this pivotal historical moment in its aftermath.\footnote{While the uprisings of May 1968 in Paris stand out the most, inspiring other movements such as the Hot Autumn in Italy, 1968 was truly a global phenomena. Among the most notable are the civil rights movement in the US and the protests against the Vietnam War, the Prague Spring and the Tlatelolco demonstrations in Mexico. For more see Samantha Christiansen and Zachary Scarlett, eds., \textit{The Third World in the Global 1960s}, (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Publishing, 2012) and Steven L.B. Jensen, \textit{The Making of International Human Rights: The 1960s, Decolonization and the Reconstruction of Global Values} (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016). For more on the aftermath of 1968 see Kristin Ross, \textit{May ’68 and its Afterlives} (Chicago, Il: University of Chicago Press, 2002) for the French context. Also see Timothy S. Brown, “1968 Transnational and Global Perspectives,” in \textit{Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte}, Version: 1.0 (11.06.2012) http://dx.doi.org/10.14765/zzf.dok.2.272.v1. In this article, Brown unpacks 1968 which he understands as “a cipher for the political and social change in the second half of the twentieth century.”}

**Actionism, the Body and Aesthetic Revolt**

The revolt against repression also took on aesthetic form with the development of 1960s counter culture, mobilized toward political ends. It is also most notable in the work of the Situationist International which used aesthetic means such as slogans, ephemera, \textit{dérive} and \textit{détournement} to refute the established order, heavily influencing the student uprisings in France. Perhaps no deployment of an aesthetic practice of total refusal, beyond acts of protest such as self-immolation, was as radical as that which occurred in Vienna. Their deployment of the body, I argue, does not appear solely as resistance toward oppressive cultural norms and political conditions, exposing the body as the site upon which power exerts its pressure and as a crucial factor in matters of social separation. Their work also, due to its specific dialogue with painting and paradox implied by the expressive potential of the gesture and the stifling restrictions implied by traditional media which veils the body in favour of the trace,
exposes a mirroring, in paint, of the body’s fate within capitalist modernity until its inevitable unleashing at a point of historical crisis. I argue that their actions displayed the body’s material self-assertion in the aftermath of the primacy of abstraction, which saw the dissolution of the figure in painting, while addressing the correlating gradual dematerialization of political subjectivity under capital. The undercurrent of the following text is the paralleled fates of the body within the longue durée proposed and of the figure within an oppressive and exclusionary modernist narrative which in the immediate postwar, hailed Abstract Expressionism as both the end of painting and a declaration of an American capitalist and cultural hegemony that was to colonize Europe as an extension of an economic recovery plan. The works of the Actionists rebel against this history by ridding themselves of painting’s instruments and rescuing the body, as both figure and flesh, from its banishment to trace in painting or mere source of labour power under capital. Their work, thus stands as the inheritor of an aesthetic ancestry motivated by a utopian desire for transcendence beyond an alienating modern condition, visible in Gustaf Klimt’s sensuous figuration, as well as a drive towards concrete reality in the midst of abstraction. That is, a realism which cannot be represented, as Courbet’s, but only experienced in and with the flesh. It also displays a certain tension between decadence and destruction, visible in the corporeal mortification of Egon Schiele’s self-portraits, Oskar Kokoschka’s turbulent expressionism, both Viennese, and the Sadean quality of Surrealist photography. The Actionists’ work, however, went beyond painting by choosing not to limit themselves to picking sides in the debate between figuration and abstraction, while also transgressing the boundaries of civil propriety, an ironic and farcical suggestion considering their location in postwar Austria, a country whose participation in the horrors of the National
Socialism was never fully accounted for until the early twenty-first century. That form of civil propriety, as moral compass for the citizen body, belonged to the same Western and patriarchal culture which produced a Holocaust; a mass, systematic and mechanized extermination of citizens which crystallized the reality of the body’s position at the mercy of state violence as well as the dire consequences of the problem of social separation. The Actionists’ radical deployment of the fleshly body, their inclusion of participants and the often public nature of their works either through performance or their capture in photography and film, call attention to a desire for collective engagement or re-enfleshing as a means to restore embodiment’s role in collective social engagement and repair a collective malaise, which permeated both Western political and aesthetic discourse from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. The political import of their work derives from their location at the intersection of a post-fascist, conservative and Catholic geo-political context on the one hand and, on the other, the utopian legacy of the Wagnerian _Gesamtkunstwerk_ and a form of _fin-de-siècle_ Expressionism characterized by mysticism and psycho-sexual disturbance. Their particular contemporary condition and ancestry highlighted not only the dialectical relationship between divergent intellectual discourses, Enlightenment and Romanticism, in the development of Modernity, both of which had come under scrutiny in the aftermath of National Socialism, but the body and art’s political weight. That is, the body and art’s potential to play a public role in raising a form of collective consciousness, one not based solely on class struggle, but which transcends the

79 In _Cultural Criticism and Society_, written in 1949, Theodor Adorno articulated this very condition, saying that writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric, implying that poetry is a product of the same culture which produced the Shoah, thus placing culture and barbarism within a dialectical relationship in the aftermath of genocide. Theodor Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society” in _Prisms_, translated by Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 17-34, 34.
fixity of social norms and inscription. This collective consciousness would require an acknowledgment of the totality of historical processes that have slowly eroded social ties and the significance of that which is held in common: the finite, desiring body. With this proposition, I do not intend to disregard the historically rooted systemic inequality, which characterizes the white, patriarchal and heteronormative society that gave shape to these oppressive conditions. Considering this, the following text also acknowledges the problematic nature of the Actionists’ work; their white, male, heterosexual subject positions and the misogyny implied by their inclusion of female participants in their actions. Without seeking to further reinscribe narratives of exclusion and dominance, this study does however explore the political and social stakes of an essential bodiliness, one that precedes inscription and acts as the material “stuff” and connective tissue of the political and social body.80

The Body and Politics

The body, its political import as well as its dismissal, is the fulcrum around which this inquiry into social separation and postwar radical aesthetic practice revolves. How then, are the individual body, the social body and the political body interconnected? How are they all historically and discursively intertwined? The body, the social body and the governing body have been intertwined on an ideological level since at least the Middle Ages and as a result,

80 Medievalist Carolyn Walker-Bynum attempt to deliver a wider perspective on the body, to free the reader from a “body that dissolves into language.” She says of the discourse on the body that “no one in the humanities seems ready to feel comfortable any longer with the idea of an essential bodiliness. We tend to reject both a bodiless that is in some way prior to the renderings, sexings, colourings, or handicappings.” Carolyn Walker Bynum, “Why all the Fuss About the Body? A Medievalist’s Perspective” in Critical Inquiry Vol. 22, No. 1 (Autumn, 1995): 1-33, 2. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1344005.
are an undercurrent of Western political thought. During the Middle Ages, the figure of the king was believed to be composed of two bodies; the natural body on the one hand and the political body on the other. The political body was intangible and consisted of “Policy and Government, and constituted for the direction of the people and the management of the public weal.”

The body politic was, therefore, enfleshed in the material body of the king but nevertheless superior to it. Sir Edmund Plowden, an English theorist during the Tudor period, argued that within the figure of the king, the “Body politic, which is annexed to his Body natural, takes away the Imbecility of his Body natural, and draws the Body natural, which is the lesser, and all the Effects thereof to itself, which is the greater.” The State has thus long been intertwined with the flesh, not only of the monarch but of the people as, according to Plowden, the body politic was composed of the ruler’s subjects.

Considering the intimate coiling of Church and State at the time, the Christian undertones of this enfleshing of politics in the figure of the king carries with it a connotation of incarnation, especially when the belief in the king’s divine right to rule is taken into account.

The communal, or rather political, organization of the Church also came to be articulated in terms of body. The term corpus mysticum, which referred to the mystical body of Christ in the form of the host, came to refer to the organizational body of the Church or the Ecclesia Universalis to which each Christian secured their belonging through participation in the Eucharist:

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82 Kantorowicz, The King's Two Bodies, 9.

83 Ibid., 13.
The new term *corpus mysticum* placed the Church as a body politic, or as a political and legal organism, on a level with the secular bodies politic which were then beginning to assert themselves as self-sufficient entities. In that respect the new ecclesiological designation of *corpus mysticum* fell in with the more general aspirations of that age: to hallow the secular politics as well as their administrative institutions.⁸⁴

What this *corpus* generates and defines in the modern period is a materiality shared among individuals. One which was instrumentalized by power structures as a means to suture a population to an external common essence, such as religion or ethnic origin qua nation. With its historical uses and abuses exposed, its significance could be examined in a manner which would escape an exclusionary common being exemplified by “the community which becomes a single thing.”⁸⁵ French Philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, well known for his deconstruction of community within the Western context, is careful to argue for a model of community that lacks a communion with a shared essence or rather to its disarticulation from categories which are exclusive, bounded and therefore infinite, such as those implied by the *Ecclesia Universalis* or the body (politic) of the king.⁸⁶ What, we might ask, occurred in the wake of the mass withdrawal from communitarian religion or the erosion of absolute monarchies?

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⁸⁴ Ibid., 197.

⁸⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, xxxix. Examples of such communities as per Jean-Luc Nancy are those expressed through attachment to Fatherland or those tethered to a leader which is consistent with my previous mention of collective identity being bound to the King or the Church through the divine body of Christ. Furthermore, the dangers of a population bound to notions of Fatherland had been made abundantly clear in the wake of National Socialism.

⁸⁶ See Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, xxxviii-xxxix.
How did the dissolution of the material body as the State, within which the political body resided, impact the importance of materiality to governance and political subjectivity? When the material body was extracted from political discourse, all that was left was a class-based form of disembodied bureaucratic governance. With the rise of the modern state and the gradual reduction of power held by bloodline monarchies when the material body of the king was no longer the divinely appointed seat of political collectivity, the visibility of the natural body’s political significance was lost. Instead, the body’s importance lay in its productive forces and those forces’ ability to generate excess value or their enforced deployment in the name of the organic body of the Nation.\(^{87}\) The body’s visibility was obscured by its articulation in terms of the wage, or the general equivalent as cipher for the time-based valuation of the body’s productive capacity under capital, which gradually became the chief means by which society was structured and governed.

The connection between the social body and the individual body has been theorized at length by figures such as Judith Butler and Michel Foucault before her, in terms of power structures and the impact of their disciplining processes. Michel Foucault famously theorized the constructed-ness of bodies, or the body as the “site where regimes of discourse and power inscribe themselves, a nodal point or nexus for relations of juridical and productive power.”\(^{88}\) While Butler’s work in *Bodies that Matter* (1993) deals mainly with gender, it nevertheless underpins the notion that the material body is inscribed or given meaning through social

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\(^{87}\) Here I refer to the imposition of labour by and for the sake of the state qua community exemplified by the fascism of the Third Reich or state-led communism.

practice. Social and cultural conditions have contributed to the body reiterating certain norms, which in turn contributes to subject formation. The concern regarding the construct-ed-ness of bodies is also the concern of this text, whereby the natural, pre-social body is evacuated of wider political and social significance as it is always already inscribed by virtue of being born into culture as well as to its own specific circumstance. This mediated social body is the result of the material, fleshy, desiring body’s entrance into language and thus, its collision with History. The disregard for this material root of the social body has led to the eclipsing of a corporeal imperative to social cohesion; a shared materiality and a full consciousness of how the co-option of that materiality by apparatuses of power has contributed to collective estrangement. However as Butler argues in an essay on Foucault, the suggestion that the body is culturally constructed “invariably suggests that there is a body that is in some sense there, pre-given, existentially available to become the site of its own ostensible construction.” It is precisely this body and its radical political potentialities that concern this study. This text understands this alienated condition to be intimately tied to what it will refer to as modern western civilization’s “tragic error” or “flaw” — its hamartia. That is, a form of disembodied consciousness, a historical wound manifest as an alienation from an individual and collective materiality, which has contributed to and exacerbated a myopia to social separation. This condition of fragmentation is thus in a dialectical relationship with historical recursion, exemplified by 1848’s repetition of 1789 as well as 1968’s own delayed reaction to

89 See Judith Butler, Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’ (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

past historical failures, political turns and returns which have exacerbated the condition of social separation that they tragically intended to overcome.

Chapter I of this text will outline the historical phenomena — Christian doctrine, Enlightenment thinking and Capitalism — that contributed to the fragmentation of the subject and to social separation. It will also further delve into the model of recursive history which this condition of alienation and collective estrangement fuels. The importance of Christianity to this inquiry is not only a historical truth, considering its dominance in all matters of life both personal and political over hundreds of years, but due to Austria’s strong Catholic identity which even in the 1970s boasted an adherence of close to ninety percent. The presence of Christian leitmotifs (fig. 3) in the works of the Actionists is another reason why I propose Viennese Actionism as a point of access into a discussion of a collective body problem, which is not only rooted in issues concerning life within a capitalist mode of production, but also a cultural heritage steeped in a belief systems whose teaching are in constant conflict with the physical body.

Consistent with recursion, following years of religious oppression, the Enlightenment sought to dispel myth through rational thought and the pursuit of knowledge via scientific inquiry into nature, and in doing so instilled its own myths to disastrous ends as discussed by Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Chapter I will also unpack Enlightenment’s abstraction of nature into quantifiable data and its subordination of body (nature) to the superiority of the rational mind. Its impact on the body’s role to individual subjectivity did little to repair the split enacted by Christian doctrine, and in turn, failed to grasp the dan-
ger of re-inscribing such a divide. The Cartesian split discouraged an embodied experience of the objective world, whereby, as per Descartes’s *Second Meditation*, “the visible world of things known through the senses disappears and we are left with the refinements of mathematical knowing.”\(^91\) Nature, therefore, the body included, is made to submit to scientific truth and reduced to measurable data. This process of abstraction, as J.M. Bernstein points out in *Against Voluptuous Bodies: Late Modernism and the Meaning of Painting*, is of the same stuff as “the abstractive device of modern forms of social reproduction… Somehow the advance of the modern world, its enlightenment, is the advance of the process of abstraction and the domination of the qualitative by the quantitative.”\(^92\) The same process of abstraction had previously been implemented by Christianity, though in the absence of scientific fact, faith and God’s will were the proof of an irrefutable truth. The oppressive dogma of the past is, therefore, not rectified with Enlightenment but rather replaced. In both cases, a form of violence is perpetrated against embodiment and this, threatening its collectivizing potential.

Finally, the reifying conditions set up by capital along with its parallel in modernist painting is also addressed in Chapter I. The rise of capitalism as the dominant world economic model, replacing Christianity’s guilt with debt, and penitence with labour, and capitalizing on Enlightenment’s emphasis on progress and scientific inquiry, only guaranteed that a cycle of domination and alienation would remain the status quo.

Chapter II will place the Actionists’ work in dialogue with an inherited Romantic Central European aesthetic and discursive history, which sought to resist the above men-

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\(^92\) Bernstein, *Against Voluptuous Bodies*, 23.
tioned conditions. The Central European obsession with social separation is explored through the art and aims of Viennese modernism as well as Wagner’s articulation of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. It will also argue for Romanticism’s role as a voice equal to the Enlightenment’s in the development of aesthetic modernity and in its most tragic political failures. Both of these epistemologies, mysticism and positivism, while seemingly diametrically opposed, do not allow for the envisioning of an alternative world. Hence society continues the cycle of oppression and rebellion, only to recuperate the language of the oppressor due to its own myopic view of its historical placement and its adherence to a shortsighted internally rationalized agenda of progress. Society thus tumbles deeper into the historical loop and farther away from any possibility of envisioning or committing to a new world order. This further fleshes out the proposed *hamartia*; society’s inability to objectively view its position in that historical loop and act in accordance with an understanding of the totality rather that the particulars. Simply put, its inability to break away from and operate outside of the dominant narrative from which its own resistance sprung. The human condition of any given era is not built upon the ashes of the one that came before it, but rather it uses those ashes as mortar for the construction of its own ethos. Thus, in its aspirations towards the development of an aesthetic state, Romanticism however, emerges as having an equally blind faith in its own inner logic, or rather, its myths, manifest in the National Socialism’s placement of its

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political hopes in the sanctity of soil and the purity of the collective body of the nation. The chapter will examine the Actionists’ reaction to the politicization of myth, the slippage which occurs between the demarcation of sovereignty and concordant subordination of the other, as well as to its impact on an already wounded individual and collective materiality. It will explore the impossibility of abolishing History and its inescapable mediation of the body.

Chapter III is dedicated to the work of VALIE EXPORT as a reaction to the dominance of her male contemporaries on the Viennese art scene and, crucially, as an exposure of the body’s mediation by cultural processes which as a women, occupying a historically subordinate subject position, she was more poignantly able to address. Her work thus exposed the Actionists’ inability to view their own privileged subject position with total criticality. She thus points to their *hamartia*, and their work’s re-inscription of the power dynamics in place, those which they were intent on disrupting. EXPORT mobilized her flesh as a site of difference, against the process of inscription, offering a more totalizing view of alienation. While her male counterparts were excavating the revolutionary potential of affect through the exposure of the body’s limits (the body which is vulnerable to violence and the taboo breaking body), VALIE EXPORT confronts the viewer with her body in a manner which draws attention to the complex systems of signification in which it is ensnared. In EXPORT’s work, as expanded upon by Roswitha Mueller, “the dialectic exchange between body and culture is most evident”\(^{96}\) and so media and mediation take precedence over painting and affect. *Touch Cinema* and *Genital Panic* for example, both performed in 1968 in the midst of the revolts

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against advanced technological society, directly engage with how the body, the female body especially, is reified by culture and capital, especially within the rapidly expanding world of mass consumer culture and entertainment. While Brus, Muehl, Nitsch and Schwarzkogler address the repressive nature of cultural processes, offering an at times violent rebuttal, EXP- PORT’s work, in its engagement with media and the notion of mediation, addresses history and her contemporary culture’s ensnaring of the female body specifically, exposing its worker function as well as the viewer’s participation in processes of “thingification.”
Chapter I: History

...the masses of the old French revolution, achieved in Roman costumes and with Roman phrases the task of their time: the emancipation and the establishment of modern bourgeois society... Wholly absorbed in the production of wealth and in the peaceful fight of competition, this society could no longer understand that the ghosts of the days of Rome had watched over its cradle.

-Karl Marx, 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, 1851.

There is always more misery among the lower classes than there is humanity in the higher.

-Victor Hugo, Les Misérables, 1862.

Marx’s quote above articulates the repetition of old paradigms, albeit under different guises, within the modern struggle for emancipation. It foreshadows, in his discussion of 1848’s repetitive nature, a modern condition of historical recursion stemming from division and betrayal. In this case, the bourgeoisie’s betrayal of its status as revolutionary class and its betrayal of its former proletarian allies of the February uprising. The Action at the University of Vienna outlined in the introduction, or rather its aftermath, performed its own form of regression. The action divided the leftist student group who had invited Muehl and Brus to perform. Some distanced themselves from the artists while others stood in solidarity with them. Eventually this rift caused the socialist student group to disband. A few years later, Brus commented: “The Uni-Action scotched any possibility for Austrian terrorism to establish itself. Although it wasn’t our intention, our action divided the leftist groups to such an extent that their ideas did not catch on or fell into the wrong hands.”

97 This quote echoes the recursive cycle of ruptures and returns underpinning this inquiry and exemplified by the failed uprisings which bracket this investigation and shape a greater modern condition. That is, efforts

97 Green, “Event at the University of Vienna,” in Writings of the Vienna Actionists, 224.
directed against dominant oppressive power structures which paradoxically gave rise to them, plagued by division, find themselves recoiling and thus strengthening the structures of domination they attempt to resist.

Alain Badiou speaks of this condition in his text *Theory of the Subject* (2009) in which he develops a theory of the political subject from a position outside of structured placement, thus escaping the violent pitfalls historically manifest in political modernity. He says: “from that which put an end to the old tyrannies, we must also know how to liberate ourselves.” 98 Even while standing in opposition to the dominant norm, Badiou suggests, there must be a realization that the opposing position is nevertheless its product—that there is futility in using its language and tactics as resistance. This statement conveys a historical looping and points to the engine which fuels the repetition or strengthening of conditions of dominance, that is, while deviating masses stand up to the structures that determine them, they vanish and, crucially, “by disappearing, the rioting masses have founded even the world that forbids them to exit.” 99 It describes the scaffolding supporting modern conditions of recursion underlying the *longue durée* examined in this chapter, whereby repeating the revolutionary model of the original rioting mass of the French Revolution — a foundational moment in the development of modern politics as well as its traditions such as democracy, nationalism and revolt — which established its own form of tyranny, 1848 failed to free itself of the tyranny it had inherited, thus founding it anew, with similar failures occurring in 1968.


99 Ibid., 68.
Considering the name of the university action as well as its rather inflammatory content, I would suggest that its aim was not simply to question the role of art under capital, but also to propose a model for art as revolutionary praxis. By taking the action outside of the gallery, a space typically assigned to art and in the 1960s more and more associated with the market, and into the public space of the classroom, the work takes on the quality of direct action within and against institutions emblematic of the dominant system, whether academia or the market. Furthermore the work brings the private functions of the body into the public, and therefore, political sphere. It spills beyond its physical boundaries and beyond those socially and culturally imposed upon it. There is thus a manner in which the body functions as an affront to dominant norms by simply existing and acting as a natural body within that public institutional space. In short, the work as per its title, examines the possibilities of a revolutionary art form, serving a public function deployed against an oppressive and alienating postwar condition, or as a delayed reaction to an economic and political state of affairs initiated in the previous century, inherited and exacerbated over the course of an accelerated and industrialized modernity.

The action shares the name of Richard Wagner’s most famous treaty, which along with *The Art Work of the Future*, outlined his thoughts on the revolutionary art work in the aftermath of the failures of 1848. According to Wagner, a total artwork, the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, serves the purpose of organically uniting a people in joyous exaltation against a world of alienation. His theory of the political function of art as a form of civic religion, its capacity to unite free individuals within an equally free aesthetic state, is an integral part of modern political and intellectual history inspired by the civilizations of Antiquity, a point which will
be discussed further in this chapter as well as the next. Whether or not the action at the university was named after Wagner’s *Art and Revolution* is not clear, but both share common aesthetic-revolutionary concern; the merging of art and life as a means by which to arrive at a different way of being in the world, a more cohesive social existence. Both endeavoured to eliminate art’s segregation and commodification by bringing it into the social and political realm of the everyday. Additionally, in each case, the centrality of the body to the work was key to its revolutionary potential: for Wagner in terms of participation and reception of the work (*Einfühlung* or compassion) and for the Actionists in terms of incorporating the body, its materiality, its processes, its violent suppression and that suppression’s impact on the psyche. They also share the desire to integrate art and life, as part of an emancipatory political praxis, through an embodied form of participation and reception, ending “the segregation of the aesthetic from the real.”

In short, art is seen to facilitate a collective, affective experience capable of alleviating individual reification and suturing social separation. The connection between the two cannot be overlooked, especially considering their interest in the radical potential of the total work of art and this, at particularly significant historical junctures.

While both Wagner and the Actionists present problematic characteristics, anti-semitism in the former’s case and misogyny on the latter’s, the historical and geo-political specificity of their outbursts of radical artistic output provide a formal matrix for the present inquiry. When

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100 Herbet Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1969), 32. By the “real,” Marcuse means every day reality. Marcuse here speaks of the liberating potential of the productive-creative aesthetic dimension where a refounding of society would imply reality taking on the aesthetic Form of a work of art, “but inasmuch as the Form is to emerge in the social process of production…art would be an integral part of shaping a new reality” meaning that art would be liberated from its purposive purposelessness, beauty from business and pleasure from exploitation.
he started work on *Das Ring des Niebelungen* in 1848, Wagner lamented capitalism’s increasing hold on society and the failure of nationalistic efforts to unite the Germanic territories, while his subsequent aesthetic output and polemics continued to be of tremendous influence well into the twentieth century. On the other hand, the work of the Actionists in the 1960s was part of a wider criticism among the youth towards repressive cultural norms and capitalist hegemony, which manifested itself in numerous countercultural and anti-authoritarian movements. However, each aimed their aesthetic practices towards rectifying a contemporary condition marked by alienation and to countering a form of reified false consciousness that impedes full recognition of an alienated state and the factors contributing to it, leading to one’s participation in their maintenance. This circumstance can best be summarized by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) whereby in a nod to Austrian psychoanalyst and student of Freud, Wilhelm Reich, they ask: “Why do men fight for their servitude as stubbornly as though it were their salvation?” I suspect that the Actionists, as well as both György Lukács and Guy Debord, would ask the same question.

Considering this ever growing struggle against conditions of alienation and social separation, from Wagner’s context in 1848 to the Actionists’ in the 1960s, and the emphasis on the body in each, I argue that within this aesthetic trajectory, the material body stands as

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101 For more on false consciousness, see György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (1971). As mentioned in the Introduction, my use of the terms “false consciousness” is indebted to Marxist theorist György Lukács who used it to designate a lack of class consciousness on the part of the proletariat who adopt the values of the bourgeois class responsible for their exploitation. In this case, I am not simply using the term in its marxian sense but rather to describe a psychical state caused by oppressive historical factors which over time impede the ability to recognize one’s own oppression on the one hand or one’s own participation in it on the other.

the connective tissue between individuals and thus as the site of this previously discussed historical wound from which springs social fragmentation.\footnote{103} While Wagner stressed the political stakes of a collectively experienced form of embodied aesthetic reception, or *Einfühlung,* the Actionists’ revolt placed the fleshy body at the centre of their actions and this at a time when the body’s position as the target of state-led violence — the state crucially being imagined within the western context as the steward of collective cohesion — attained its brutal conclusion with the Holocaust. The violent and radical nature of the Actionists’ “uprising” gives form to, and resists through action, a historically contingent modern malaise defined as a corporeally grounded alienation from self and other as well as to its dire consequences. As such, and considering the Wagnerian and aesthetic-political ancestry from which it springs, their revolt also speaks to a desire to overcome social separation through embodied experience. In this case, through an exposure to the body’s finite materiality, thus transcending those tactics offered by models of administrative and bureaucratic forms of governance, which in the postwar/Cold War context, had proven to be failures.

**Art, Politics and Civic Unity**

This study as well as its historical span must be considered in relation to the intersection of art and politics, not only within the origins of the Western democratic model, but within the moments of upheaval which bracket this inquiry. The belief in the political function of art, of art as a form of civic religion, as was the case within the context of Classical

\footnote{103} This condition of fragmentation, manifest in the social upheaval of the late 1960s, extends beyond the specificity of geo-political borders, lending a possibility for this inquiry, and its stakes, to be expanded to a more global perspective.
Greece, and hence its capacity to unite free individuals within an equally free aesthetic state propounded in Wagner’s influential and contested polemics, is an integral part of modern political and intellectual history. The very beginnings of modern democracy displayed this sort of aesthetic-political impetus with the Cult of the Reason and the Festival of the Supreme Being, both born out of the French Revolution. Each sought to fill the void left in the new secular state with a communal creative force, a new religion (as in religiare or to link together) that would unite a newly freed people. While the French tradition was driven by mythologizing and even sacralizing reason as the above mentioned rituals attest, the German intellectual tradition, as excavated by Josef Chytry in his text, The Aesthetic State (1989), was motivated by the romantic historical reach backward to antiquity as an antidote to the divisive conditions of modernity. Indeed, the question of a unifying myth in relation to a secular historical elaboration of society has preoccupied considerable critical thought from Schiller to Marcuse, while Wagner himself attempted to move from theory to praxis with the Gesamtkunstwerk following the failure of the German State to materialize.

In the wake of National Socialism and the fascist aestheticization of politics, exemplified by Nazi rallies such as those documented in the film The Triumph of the Will (1935), the expectation that art could serve a political, specifically nationalistic function in a manner that could be expected to repair broken social ties has become anathema. This rejection of art’s

104 The Festival of the Supreme Being served as an elaborate and ostentatious ritual gathering organized by artist Jacques-Louis David. The rival Festival of Reason which sought to replace God with the goddess of Reason saw churches across the country be desacralized and reconsecrated as temples to Reason.

political function and embodied aesthetic reception was further magnified when an apolitical formalist approach, which championed disengaged viewing and an abstract visual language, dominated the art historical and critical field in the immediate postwar period and well into the 1960s.

Why then did this recrudescence of the radical, collectivizing, unifying, communal total artwork, capable of restoring and addressing a body politic, emerge in Vienna in the 1960s? And why was it so heavily reliant on the exposure of and to the material body, understood in all its historical overdetermination as thick with at once obscenity, shame, and shameless potential? In the aftermath of formal abstraction in painting, why the reappearance of the body? Why a violent assertion of its materiality? And in what way is the body implicated or rather, why is it the ground zero of an inquiry into political agency and into a historical trajectory bookended by two failed revolutions? These are some of the questions the present chapter will seek to address through an examination of specific historical phenomena as well as history’s very ontology.

**History, Hamartia and Recursion**

Our contemporary moment, it appears, is hinting that the past is demanding something of the present. Perhaps the greatest indication of this is the resurgence of far-right politics in Europe less than a century after the end of World War II. This condition effectively places history, its linearity or rather its location in the past, sharply into question. It also begs a reconsideration of history’s sequential trajectory, one implied both by modern history’s
proposed narrative of progress as well as the suggestion of that narrative’s failure.\footnote{See Adorno and Horkheimer, \textit{Dialectic of Enlightenment}. (2002).} History has long been interpreted teleologically, whether in terms of eschatology or progress, that is, whether in terms of God’s divine plan for the End of Days or man’s march out of superstition and barbarism towards civility. How can History be defined and objectively understood, indeed as a science, as Karl Marx insisted it to be, when due to the varying perspectives of histories, nations, classes, experiences of struggle, we can never be collectively stably oriented in relation to it? Perhaps it is worth considering modern history's paradox; in the perceived temporal march forward, surmised via scientific advancement, perceived social progress and the passage of time, there has been a collective failure to recognize a historical recursion.\footnote{The term collective deserves defining or rather qualifying, especially considering that, as will be discussed in Chapter III, certain groups have been excluded from the collective in terms of political participation and juridical rights due to power dynamics and hierarchies based on bodily difference. The notion of the collective has shifted and designated, in the West, the Greek \textit{polis}, the \textit{Ecclesia Universalis}, Habermas’ bourgeois public sphere and the proletariat. In short, within the political sphere, it designates those members of the public in a position to claim juridical inclusion and participation in state politics. Within the historical context of this study, which encompasses industrial modernity up to the 1960s, while experiencing shifts (like women’s suffrage for example) it is predominantly male and white. This, therefore contributing to \textit{hamartia}, or our historical myopia (which is thus also social, cultural and political) contributing to recursion. While there has been acknowledgement of historical repetitions by scholars and experts, these assessments come from a position of privilege (in terms of knowledge and education) and thus do not account for the greater population, or collective’s inability to recognize historical recursion and break away from structures of dominance which continue to oppress it.} I am not proposing a fixed set of laws which dictate historical development, but rather that the present moment holds within it the ripples and creases of the past. That is, while the concepts of Time and History are attached to a forward moving heliocentric model and the recording of sequential events, the recursion, re-inscription or strengthening of existing power dynamics and oppressive conditions under the guise of social progress, goes ignored or slips from
consciousness. I propose this recursive cycle to resemble a *mise en abyme* exemplified perhaps most famously by Giotto di Bondone’s *Stephaneschi Triptych* from 1315. The triptych itself is depicted within the painting thus its self-reference, recurring indefinitely eventually escapes perception. This recursive model of history may also be spatialized, or understood as a topological paradox through the Moebius Strip. This object of mathematical inquiry has been used by figures such as psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan to illustrate the slippage of the signifying process, which comes to constitute the subject’s unconscious as well as the co-relation between the conscious and unconscious. Lacan speaks of trauma and repetition through the figure of Oedipus, the tragic figure bound by *hamartia* discussed in the introduction, countering Freud’s Oedipal complex. He argues that Oedipus’s unrelenting desire to know the truth of his birth pushes him beyond the realm of the symbolic, as conveyed by the words and riddle of the blind prophet and of the Sphinx, towards the encounter with the reality of his origins through the realization of the incestuous encounter with the mother. Linda Belau explains: “What Oedipus seeks in this recognition is a knowledge without return. Knowledge comes too late for Oedipus, however. He misses the experience, which, for

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him, is the constituting moment of his subjectivity… however, as chance encounter, as tuché, was unreadable as such.”

Oedipus repeats that which he tries to avoid, killing his father and sleeping with his mother and his ignorance of that fact is precisely what makes “the encounter with the real” a missed encounter. The “missed encounter” is missed in that it goes unrecognized and so is repeated. Repetition of the traumatic event is thus a result of that constitutive event’s unknowability. It is in Oedipus’s recognition that the hamartia tragically comes to light. Hamartia is therefore unseen, much like the twist in the Moebius Strip’s structure which causes a failed recognition of its recursive quality necessarily interrupting a linear and progressive temporal unfolding.

In terms of the present inquiry, I propose the Moebius Strip to be useful in illustrating the stumbling block towards registering historical recursion. Imagining the strip as a surface continuously traveled upon, there would be an inadvertent and imperceptible return to a point of origin. Having passed to the other side of the strip without a cut, that return appears as an uninterrupted forward trajectory. The twist in the strip which would mark the point of recursion, goes unrecognized. Although it is experienced as linear and continuous, much like history, turns, re/returns, and cycles escape immediate consciousness. The Moebius Strip in my account illustrates the dialectical “torsion” between past and present, between rupture and regression, thus providing a topological model for recursive history. My argument thus re-

112 Belau, “Trauma and the Material Signifier,” (2001)

113 Belau says: “And it is only in the repetition of the event, after the fact and within the social realm of the Theban context, that Oedipus is able to read his terrible deed as the event it is: that is, as the missed event. It is precisely this miss that lends the traumatic, uncommemorable dimension to the tragic event. This is precisely why Lacan will say that only repetition can commemorate the trauma, which is, otherwise, unrecognizable in itself.”

places a linear understanding of history with an at once descriptive and psychoanalytical model of recursion, punctuated by moments of rupture and regression. This analogy or the Moebius Strip thus provides a visual anchor for the historical cycle which underpins a state of alienation from an individual and collective materiality and the unregistered historical wounding, or *hamartia*, outlined in the introduction, which serves as the scaffolding of this art historical inquiry.

From a temporal perspective, the recursive model proposed begins with the failures of 1848 and the farcical repetition of Bonapartism which, lamented by Marx, stands as an interruption in time’s progressive unfolding. Meaning that is served as a veritable moment of temporal collapse whereby “emptied of its dialectical content, history seems ‘without events’, that is, barely history, ‘wearying with constant repetition of the same tensions, the same relaxations.’”  

It is in this collapse — these *tensions* and *relaxations*, curiously mirrored by Marx’s use of the vernacular of topology — that I locate the twist in the proposed Moebius Strip analogy. This *longue durée* can, therefore, be understood as a recursive coil of resistance and submission beginning with a particular historical failure. As touched upon in the Introduction to this text, this failure is particularly significant to the development of capitalism as a political economy. It reflects the shift from a mode of governance based on the representation of the citizen body to which the Great Revolution had aspired, to the state serving as “the representative of a specific class in the exploitation of a different one.”  

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result of this shift being greater collective fragmentation along class lines and the exacerbation of individual estrangement due to the obligation of the labourer to sell the productive forces of his or her body. These conditions of fragmentation and alienation, compounded further by the dominance of an oppressive temporal model crystallized in the form of the wage, which governs both one’s ability to acquire the material needs for subsistence as well as the means by which society is structured, further fuel the recursive cycle which in the context of this inquiry, is bookended by another year of revolt in 1968. Thus, as the introduction previously outlined, the unrest of 1968, functions as a delayed reaction to the conditions set in place by the failures of 1848 and which were gradually, and imperceptibly due to capital’s tendency to emulate greater freedom through the raising of living standards, worsened throughout the proposed longue durée. Both these failed moments of rupture, having risen out of the dominant oppressive structures which had created them and from which they had inherited their language, however significant their victories, ultimately submitted to, and strengthened, the system they resisted and paradoxically depended upon.

This chapter on History demands a brief return to the Sophoclean tragedy discussed in the introduction.117 I invoke the story of Oedipus, but this time through its citation in sculpture, more precisely Hermann Nitsch’s Oedipus from 1990 (fig. 4). While it was produced much later than the period under consideration, it nevertheless speaks to the aforementioned historical wound impacting historical consciousness of social separation and its root-

117 It is important for the reader to keep in mind that the development of Greek tragedy dating from the Athenian Golden Age in the fifth century, correlates with the development of democracy in Greek Philosophical and political thought implying that civic duty meant participation in both the aesthetic and political dimensions of Athenian public life. Furthermore, this being the foundation of Western political history, its influence on modern political development cannot be underestimated.
edness in the body, and does so at another crucial juncture germane to the present inquiry; the failure of state-run Communism. Oedipus’s *hamartia*, which led him to kill his father and marry his mother, is formally made manifest with his physical blinding. The sculpture, a white, neoclassical head, is blindfolded. Red paint, like blood, seeps through the gauzy blindfold and drips down the figure’s smooth cheeks. The figure’s face is devoid of expression as though unfazed by the self-inflicted pain or by the knowledge of what has come to pass. The sculpture itself formally conveys with paint, the figurative and literal blindness implied by *hamartia*. It also signals recursion with the return to a classical visual vernacular (at a crucial historical and political moment) aesthetically emblematic of a modern discursive and political nostalgia and obsession with an idealized humanist past which championed the pursuit of reason on the one hand as well as the mythical aesthetic state and art’s capacity to bind a people on the other. Within Athenian tragedy, the figure of Oedipus stands at this crossroads of *logos* and *mythos*. The play itself was written at a time when Ancient Greece occupied the same position; strict submission to the Gods alongside a well-elaborated humanism which spawned advancement in philosophical thought and democratic participation. The co-existence of these seemingly mutually exclusive world-views were made manifest in the

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118 With this emphasis on the date of this art object’s production, I wish to stress the possible extension of this political and social *hamartia* beyond 1968, therefore opening the door for a continuation to historical recursion in relation to the triumph of capitalism.

119 I refer here to the Enlightenment and Romantic understandings of democracy.

120 See Eva Cybulska, “Oedipus a Thinker at the Crossroads,” *Philosophy Now: A Magazine of Ideas*, Issue 75 (Spring/Summer, 2009). [https://philosophynow.org/issues/75/Oedipus_A_Thinker_At_The_Crossroads](https://philosophynow.org/issues/75/Oedipus_A_Thinker_At_The_Crossroads). While this condition of occupying the crossroads between reason and myth is what has made Oedipus such an interesting subject of literary and critical observation, Dr. Eva Cybulska outlines its collective historical and political ramifications in this article.
polis’ participation in the dramatic performances of the Dionysian festivals. The dialectical
tension between knowledge and myth is rife within the figure of the tragic king as he credits
his intelligence for defeating the Sphinx and fulfilling the messianic prophecy, yet looks to
Apollo when Thebes is stricken by plague.\textsuperscript{121} The irony of the Oedipal tragedy mirrors that of
the Enlightenment’s Apollonian thrust whereby, in its ambitions to shed light on what was
once plunged into darkness, it becomes blind to its own tyranny. The figure of Oedipus as the
enlightened yet tragic subject points to the Enlightenment’s “eradication of its own self-
awareness”\textsuperscript{122} made clear by its indiscriminate rationalization of everything from the scientific control of nature to fascistic state-led violence deployed in the name of freedom, civility, order and nationalistic zeal. Both Oedipus and the three historical phenomena which will be unpacked forthwith; Religion, Reason and Reification, which I argue are at the root of
hamartia or have contributed to a fissure in the collective body, exemplify the irony of the
popular aphorism “the road to hell is paved with good intentions.”

The following chapter will continue to track the dematerialization of the subject, or
the erosion of the political and social significance of the body, in relation to a broader historical totality. This historical trajectory will be placed in dialogue with the Actionists’ procedural violence; actions which gave aesthetic form to a corporeal exigency, or a drive towards the concrete, deployed in reaction to violence, real and latent, institutional and discur-
sive, and to the primacy of both abstractions that characterized modernity. As Marshall Berman states on the modern condition’s “unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said: ‘all that is solid melts into air.”

At the onset of his book *The Inoperative Community*, philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy addresses a Western intellectual and political focus on the problem of social separation — a problem which the modern state sought to take on as arbiter of collective cohesion among equal citizens — articulated in terms of nostalgia for a lost originary community exemplified by the Athenian polis, the Roman Republic, and the very early Christian community. This proposition is important for the present inquiry for two reasons. First, it defines the human political project in terms of the desire to resuscitate a bygone or rather mythical egalitarian community of free individuals accountable to the whole and to each other. Secondly, and as Nancy states in his text, it expresses nostalgia in political process which, in its uncritical historical reach backwards, seeks to recapture an instance of community which never actually

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123 I define modernity here as both a historical period and the experience of large scale social, political, economic, technological changes. Accordingly, I also consider the response to those conditions in art and literature.


125 The influence of Ancient Roman on the aspiration of the French Revolution serves as an indication of this symptom.
existed in the manner in which it has been imagined. The impasse presented by the dis-

juncture between this political agenda and its grounding in an idealized historical moment, a
blind, uncritical nostalgia largely stemming from a male and Eurocentric intellectual point of
view, is part and parcel of the *hamartia* which was outlined in the introduction to this
project. It is worth noting that Nancy wrote the text in the mid-1980s before the collapse of
the USSR, meaning that it sprung out of the clear betrayal of communist ideals on the part of
the state-run Communism. Briefly, were this proposed recursive history to expand its tem-
poral expanse, the *longue durée* examined could very well extend to the events of
1989-1991. Communism, to Nancy, designates a betrayed ideal, that is “a desire to discov-
er or rediscover a community beyond individualism and the socio-economic division that
plagues the modern world.” I understand this to be not only descriptive of an antithesis to

126 While I do not think it is necessary to elaborate why this lost community of equals never actually
existed, the dedication of an entire chapter of this project to VALIE EXPORT lends perspective on
this point. These fetishized communities such as the Athenian Polis and the Roman Republic exclud-
ed women as well as non-citizens and slaves, who were considered barbarians. History and discourse
in the West therefore can be considered male and Euro-centric contributing considerably to the issue
of recursion, due to the interest of a limited number of people (citizens) under consideration, and this,
necessarily impacting solidarity and the strength of movements of resistance.

127 The reader may question why I propose this point of view to be gendered. Considering that the
Athenian *polis* did not include women as citizens and the misogyny inherent in the Christian narra-
tive, any praxis or discourse arising out of a desire to recapture this form of political community will
necessarily always already be gendered male and will adopt its patriarchal and heteronormative lan-
guage. VALIE EXPORT will be making this condition visible in Chapter III.


129 While Nancy’s oeuvre deals with community and labour through Bataille within the very specific
context of the aftermath of communist totalitarianism, my intention in invoking his work is to support
the claim of a “communist exigency” which I view not only applying to the text’s historical specifici-

capital, but to be the core and original aim of Western politics, a modern political agenda inspired by civilizations of antiquity and which sought to replace bloodline monarchies. That is, politics as a means by which a group of equal individuals freely govern themselves in a manner which benefits all within the community. This aim, as previously mentioned, was steered off course when the protection of bourgeois capitalist interest tethered itself to a democratic political model, a moment pinpointed by Marx in the *18th Brumaire* as the failures of 1848.\(^{131}\) Indeed Marx alludes to their impact and historical import in 1856 when he says that

> The so called revolutions of 1848 were but poor incidents, small fractures and fissures in the dry crust of European society. But they denounced the abyss. Beneath the apparently solid surface, they betrayed oceans of liquid matter, only needing expansion to rend into fragments continents of hard rock.\(^{132}\)

To Nancy, this nostalgic view of community “informs all the western thinking of community since the beginning” whether the “romantic view of lost community” or “a modern view of a rational society of self interest” which welcomes the loss of community and birth of society.\(^{133}\) Crucially this implies an uncritical historical reach backwards to an understanding of community which was exclusionary, being an “organic communion of itself with its own

\(^{131}\) See Melhman’s chapter “History” in *Revolution and Repetition* (1977). Particularly his discussion of Bonapartism which embodies the State as antagonistic to society or an external apparatus of control and where the State becomes representative of a “specific class in the exploitation of another” (14-15)

\(^{132}\) See Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, (1848) “The executive of the modern state is but a committee managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.”

\(^{133}\) Morin, *Jean-Luc Nancy*, 74.
members” as the basis for all western politics, a model which has been recursively looked to and recycled whether in moments of revolutionary rupture or moments of regression.\(^{134}\)

Looking to Nancy serves a twofold purpose: firstly, to illustrate the nostalgic and erroneous nature of the modern political project that underpins this study thus grounding \textit{hamartia} as an implicit part of that project since its inception, hence the impasse toward collective cohesion presented by bureaucratic forms of governance in the West. Secondly, to illustrate that politics has always been founded upon a “communist exigency,” and this before Time’s binding to the cadence of chrematistics, the death nell of social accountability and solidarity, and the subsequent political split into liberalism and socialism.\(^{135}\)

\section*{History: Time and Money}

Ironically, and germane to the topic of recursion, the term “revolution” designates both the overthrow of a government or particular social order, as well as a rotation which concludes at its starting point. Linguistically, the term’s internal contradiction mirrors the model of history that I am proposing. The very premise of this investigation into the outburst of radical bodily actions in Vienna is laid upon the foundation that the growing discontent of the 1960s, hitting its apogee in 1968, can be understood as a manifestation of “unfinished business” stemming from the state’s mandate shifting from the protection of the rights of all citizens to the prioritization of private property and the accumulation of wealth. Particularly

\(^{134}\) Nancy, \textit{Inoperative Community}, 9.
For further clarifications also see Morin, \textit{Jean-Luc Nancy}, 74-75.

\(^{135}\) For more on the philosophy of Time and its social and political construction in Western history and culture, see Eric Alliez, \textit{Capital Times: Tales from the Conquest of Time} (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
germane to the present case study, Marx illustrates this, as well as the structural tendency of
described by Marx, in his comments on the rise of the Bourgeois State in the *18th Brumaire*, for
example: “wholly absorbed in the production of wealth and in the peaceful fight of competi-
tion, this society could no longer understand that the ghosts of the days of Rome had watched
over its cradle.”

Instead of thinking of history as the progressive passage of centuries and
ages as something that is wholly in the past, there is not only something of the past within
present moments, but historical evidence of its veiled cyclical return especially in times of
social crisis. This ‘veiling’ presupposes that history and time are beyond the realm of lived
human experience. Time can only be experienced retroactively through language and text—
that is, through the written recording of events.

Time, within the pre-modern or pre-capitalist age, has been understood as the move-
ment of celestial bodies personified as Gods, has been experienced through the cycle of sea-
sonal labours, and conceptualized as penitential debt in exchange for salvation. The Chris-
tianization of the West for example, brought with it a new conception of time. It introduced
temporal life on earth as merely a preparation for everlasting life after death. It introduced
penitential time and threatened the imminence of the End of Days. It ordered the week ac-
cording to God’s creation of the world, and daily life according to canonical hours of prayer.
Conversely, since the rise of capitalism, time has been understood in terms of the wage, with
life gradually adopting the pace of mechanized production. In his text *Capital Time: Tales*

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137 History’s intertwining with Language and Text, without reiterating the inadequacy of each, already
renders it a subject of considerable criticism as they can be both understood as an apparatus of power.
For more on this see Giorgio Agamben, “What is an Apparatus?” in *What is an Apparatus? and Other
from the Conquest of Time (1991), Eric Alliez argues that with the above mentioned progression, time as history’s substructure gradually “having espoused the eis apeiron progression of chrematistics,” thus detaching itself from Earth’s heliocentric movement, has seen chrematistics impose its own rhythm upon it. In other words, time qua money, has usurped nature as the force which dictates the rhythm of terrestrial life. With the practice of amassing wealth, time became detached from nature and from the organic rhythm of the life of the polis to take on the cadence of accumulation. Time, therefore, becomes unnatural and severed from human needs. This condition, according not only to Marxist thought but even to Aristotle, has fractured social and political life. “Money is torn from its political condition of mediating need to become the number of an artificial and convulsive movement. The infinite movement of accumulation is what empties the city of its self-presence.” Within the context of the Modern era, with the post-medieval awakening of the rational mind, gradual secularization and the rise of capitalism, Time took on the money form under the guise of the wage, and the rhythm of daily life became that of unequal exchange, disrupting reciprocal human relations. Time understood in this fashion, which is to say the recording of time under capital, is nothing more than the recording of the lived conditions of inequality and the general equivalent’s dictatorship over human events. Therefore underscoring the longue durée proposed, is the revelation that under these conditions, the finite body, whether it lives or dies, is at the mercy of time in the form of an economic dependence on the outsourcing of labour which necessarily impacts history’s unfolding. Considering this, modern history’s events appear less as a lin-

138 Alliez, Capital Time, 2.

139 Alliez, Capital Times, xvii.
ear progression than as instances of rupture and recrudescence, a recursive loop of resistance and submission to lived conditions which at their core are dictated by the exploitative cadence of the working day. This paradox of dependence and resistance, participation and opposition, on and against the dominant oppressive structures upheld by a temporal model that dictates the very ability to gain the material needs for subsistence, is the condition which underscores the historical recursion outlined earlier. With the stakes being firmly located in the body, in the capacity to sustain one’s life, and that capacity’s dependance on the very target of revolutionary action, commitment to its exploitative conditions becomes a matter of life and death. This therefore accounts for the submission of history’s moments of rupture to the conditions which they resist, further strengthening their hold despite the significant social changes they may have yielded.

This modern historical condition of recursion, therefore, demonstrates a rhythm dictated by self-preservation in the form of capitulation to the pressures exerted by external apparatuses of power and material conditions they enforce. Returning to *Art and Revolution*, the University Action of 1968, this dynamic appears to be mirrored in the interaction between Muehl and the masochist on the one hand, and Brus’s unleashing of the *id* in the form of his most base bodily processes on the other. I am approaching each from a psychoanalytical viewpoint which arguably correlates to the greater question of historical recursion as repetitive drive stemming from the internalization of social and cultural structures which are paradoxically repressive though repeated. Firstly, Brus’s masturbation and defecation all bear

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Adorno and Horkheimer discuss this dynamic of self-preservation in their critique of pure reason in the Juliette chapter of *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002) saying: “For those at the top, shrewd self-preservation means the fascist struggle for power, and of individuals it means adaptation to injustice at any price.” (71)
signs of behaviour belonging to the subject before entrance into the Symbolic Order, that is a
display of the pleasure principle’s drive to satisfy biological needs uninhibited by the struc-
tured reality which governs the world of intersubjective relations. The indulgence in natural
bodily processes in public defies the acceptance of the Lacanian nom-du-père, or the realm of
the law and its governing institutions. The outburst also functions to disrupt the dominant
order of things by transgressing all Western norms of cultural propriety with the abject erup-
tion of the Real through an encounter with the body’s most base processes. This eruption is
counterbalanced by the sadomasochist interaction. While the act itself seems transgressive, I
read it to instead reflect the violence and perversion inherent in a society which gave rise to a
Holocaust, itself mimetic of a political economy which extracts profit from bodies while
quelling those bodies’ libidinal drives and indeed their very vitality, as well as to the psycho-
sexual neuroses such conditions are susceptible to engender. In relation to this, Adorno
writes in the aftermath of the Second World War and in defence of Freud’s instinctivism in
the face of revisionist attacks, that “culture, by enforcing restrictions on libidinal and particu-
larly on destructive drives, is instrumental in bringing about repressions, guilt feelings, and
need for self-punishment.”141 As a whole, the interaction “mimics” Western cultural dynam-
ics of dominance and submission, intrinsic not only to capitalism but to the power structures
which preceded and sired it: to Christianity’s economy of guilt and penance paid for with the
torment of the body, as well as instrumental reason’s capacity for great cruelty reaching its
logical conclusion with the extermination of the European Jews (exemplified by Sadean sex-

141 Theodor Adorno, “Social Sciences and Sociological Tendencies in Psychoanalysis,” April 27, 1946
(unpublished) from the Lowenthal collection as quoted in Martin Jay, The Dialectical Imagination:
History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Science 1923-1950 (London, UK: Heine-
mann Educational Books Ltd 1973), 104.
ual torture, which Adorno and Horkheimer expand upon in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The figure of the masochist in the university action, thus embodies and makes literal willful submission as libidinal drive, and participation in one’s own subjugation which contributes to the maintenance of oppressive power structures. It also highlights the perverse nature of the dynamic; the masochist experiences sexual pleasure from physical pain, while under capital, oppression is made palatable even imperceptible due to the ever growing creation and satisfaction of false needs.

**Repression, Rupture and Return**

It is difficult to overestimate the turning point that was the French Revolution of 1789 and its global impact. Its dissolution of an absolute monarchy represents the starting point of a modern political obsession with the creation of an egalitarian community of free individuals modelled on a fetishistic admiration of antiquity. As history will attest, what was a project of individual and political emancipation driven by rational thought and the desire for economic and political equality through the right to private property, descended into the Jacobin Reign of Terror during which thousands of people fell victim to the guillotine, and ultimately ended with Napoleon Bonaparte declaring himself emperor and reinstating a repressive “rule

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142 Here I refer to the worker’s submission to the wage, and Christianity’s required submission to doctrine with the promise of everlasting salvation.


144 For more on false needs see Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, (1964) and Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (1967).
of one.” Despite this, the Revolution, or rather the enlightenment project which inspired it, is remembered as a successful event since it triggered the gradual collapse of monarchical rule and paved the way for capitalism and democracy to be established as dominant political and economic models in the West.

Aesthetically, the French Revolution has remained a point of reference for radical political action well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, from its festivals of the revolution and its barricades, to its classical personification of liberty and reason in the figure of Marianne and the rallying battle cry of Liberté! Égalité! Fraternité!, a repetitive revolutionary impetus much decried by Marx in the aftermath of 1848. In the 18th Brumaire, he says: “at such very epochs of revolutionary crisis do they conjure up in service the spirits of the past, assume their names, their battle cries, their costumes to enact a new historic scene in such time-honoured disguise and with such borrowed language.” To Marx, the events of 1848, which led to Louis Bonaparte’s coup in 1851, was a farcical repetition of 1789. Marx says:

The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry from the past, it can draw that only for the future. It cannot start about its work until it has stricken off all superstition concerning the past. Former revolutions require historic reminiscence in order to intoxicate themselves with their own

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145 In the opening pages of the 18th Brumaire, Marx is sure to lament the “conjuring up of old ghosts” for the purpose of “rekindling revolutionary spirit.” Just as the French Revolution revived the spectres of the Roman Republic, even adopting its aesthetics, Marx’s views 1848 as having been a caricature. He says: “Man makes his own history, but he does not make it out of the whole cloth; he does not make it out of conditions chosen by himself but out of such as he finds close at hand.” (9-10).

146 Marx, 18th Brumaire, 9.
issues. The revolutions of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their
dead in order to reach its issue.\textsuperscript{147}

Marx here laments the nostalgic look to the past in times of revolutionary crisis as well as the
myopic understanding of contemporary conditions which this project has argued is part of a
western political \textit{hamartia}. However, revolutions following 1789 were not the only ones suf-
fering from an uncritical praising of the past.\textsuperscript{148} The neo-classical, rational ideals of the
French Revolution attempted to recapture the idealized glory and perceived political equality
of a Roman Republic which was not only divided along class lines, but which, like the
French First Republic, ultimately fell under Imperial rule. Thus the emancipatory, rational
project that was the Great Revolution was itself a blind repetition of a political and intellec-
tual project ending in bloodshed and the rationalization of barbarism in the name of uphold-
ing republican ideals. There is therefore nothing “modern” about the development of modern
politics as it has always been founded upon an idealization of past political models. Further-
more, sprung from tyranny, from a culture delineated by splitting (both subjectively and in-
tersubjectively) structural entities such as a language and law, it appears to only re-inscribe
tyranny under a different form thus repeating it. Marx alludes to this in the \textit{18th Brumaire}
regarding the failures of 1848 which led to the reign of another Bonaparte, saying

Man makes his own history, but he does not make it out of the whole cloth…
At the very time when men appear engaged in revolutionizing things and

\textsuperscript{147} Karl Marx, \textit{18th Brumaire}, 11.

\textsuperscript{148} Karl Marx, in \textit{The 18th Brumaire}, says: “Thus did Luther masquerade as the Apostle Paul; thus did
the revolution of 1789-1814 drape itself alternately as Roman republic and as Roman Empire; nor did
the revolution of 1818 know what better to do than to parody at one time the year 1789, at another the
revolutionary traditions of 1793-95…” (9).
themselves, in bringing about what never was before…do they anxiously
conjure up the spirits of the past, their names, their battle cries, their costumes
to enact a new historic scene in such time-honored disguise and with such
borrowed language.\textsuperscript{149}

The excerpt encompasses two of the driving forces behind recursive history: first, the inability
to consider history in its totality and, second, the nostalgic practice of appropriating the lan-
guage of a romanticized political past. That is, just as its revolutionary predecessors of 1789,
to use Marx's own terms, it revived the dead for the purpose of glorifying its (new)
struggle.\textsuperscript{150} However, as discussed in the introduction to this text, 1848 is nevertheless signif-
icant to the political and economic development of the West, especially from a Marxist per-
spective; it stands as the first instance of true political resistance on the part of the working
class and revealed the state as an external apparatus of control, as "an organ of class domina-
tion, an organ of oppression of one class by another."\textsuperscript{151} The failure of 1848 ultimately ex-
posed capitalism as a thorn in democracy's side, making it clear that the new world order was
as oppressive and exclusive as the old.

Nevertheless, the "Springtime of the People" grew to become the greatest instance of
political upheaval in Europe. While in France the revolutionary zeal was spurred on by the

\textsuperscript{149} Karl Marx, \textit{18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte}, 9.

\textsuperscript{150} Karl Marx, \textit{18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte}, 10.
Also, in the opening of the text, Marx lays the groundwork for 1848's failures by arguing that in es-
tablishing a modern bourgeois society and achieving emancipation, the revolution of 1789 looked to
the Roman Republic to rekindle a revolutionary spirit and in the process conjured up its demons. 1848
on the other hand had a previous revolution in the not-so-distant past to look to for inspiration while
loosing sight of valuable historical lessons.

\textsuperscript{151} Vladimir Lenin, \textit{The State and Revolution} as quoted by Mehlman, \textit{Revolution and Repetition}, 15.
desire for greater democratic representation and the dire conditions of the poor working class, in other parts of Europe the aims were the dissolution of absolute monarchies and a desire for national unity as in the Germanic territories. The German effort failed to achieve national unity due to the splitting of the formerly aligned middle and working classes and their eventual defeat at the hands of the conservative aristocracy.

The revolutions of 1848 in the Austrian Empire, which began in March and occurred in direct response to the February uprisings in Paris, were triggered partly by diverse nationalist sentiments. The unrest was also fuelled by a general hatred for the repressive conservatism of the Metternich government which had the Austrian capitalists at its feet against the other classes. Furthermore, while there was some solidarity among classes in Vienna, in October cracks began to show when the manufacturing class began to fear instability and its impact on production while the proletariat, although willing, were largely unarmed and politically unaware. Finally as Engels states:

152 See Friedrich Engels, Revolution and Counter Revolution in Germany (1851-52), First published in New York Tribune, 1851-1852, as book, 1896. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/germany/ch05.htm. Last revised, 2010. In Section V, on the Vienna Insurrection, he writes: “On the 24th of February, 1848, Louis Philippe was driven out of Paris, and the French Republic was proclaimed. On the 13th of March following, the people of Vienna broke the power of Prince Metternich, and made him flee shamefully out of the country.” Engels is clearly drawing a link between the events.

153 For more see F. Engels Revolution and Counter Revolution in Germany (1851-52), Chapter IV: Austria, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/germany/ch04.htm “…Metternich… had, of course, the satisfaction of seeing the Austrian capitalists at his feet. They were, besides, in every other respect at his mercy: the large profits which bankers, stock-jobbers, and Government contractors always contrive to draw out of an absolute monarchy, were compensated for by the almost unlimited power which the Government possessed over their persons and fortunes; and not the smallest shadow of an opposition was, therefore, to be expected from this quarter. Thus Metternich was sure of the support of the two most powerful and influential classes of the empire, and he possessed besides an army and a bureaucracy, which for all purposes of absolutism could not be better constituted.”
The shout for a return to a regular system of government, and for a return of the Court, both of which were expected to bring about a revival of commercial prosperity—this shout became now general among the middle classes…the unity and strength of the revolutionary force was broken; the class-struggle between bourgeois and proletarian had come in Vienna, too, to a bloody outbreak, and the counter-revolutionary camarilla saw the day approaching on which it might strike its grand blow.\textsuperscript{154}

The events of 1848 therefore set the stage for the primacy of profit and property over economic and political equality to become the status quo we continue to face today. The rational maintenance of order at all costs caused the state and the economic interests of the property-owning elite to be prioritized over the value of individual life implied by inalienable rights to freedom from oppression. Instead, that value is conflated with that articulated by the general equivalent and the amount of profit a life can yield through labour, resulting in further subjective and intersubjective fragmentation.

Why then, the repetition of historical narratives? Why, in attempting to call attention to the value of life and to the rights of the collective, have moments of political unrest resulted in appeasement and in the bolstering of power structures? The answer lies at a point where the value of life has been gradually and unconsciously disassociated from any relation to that which determines the “condition of living” — that is, the material body, which the Actionists’ exposed in all its fleshly concreteness — and came instead to be conflated with “living con-

\textsuperscript{154} Friedrich Engels \textit{Revolution and Counter Revolution in Germany} (1851-52), Chapter XI: The Vienna Insurrection. \url{https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/germany/ch11.htm}
ditions” which necessarily implied the prioritization and rationalization of the accumulation of goods and capital. This overlooked disassociation from the body and thus between bodies only perpetuates this inherited political cycle much like a collective fate neurosis.\textsuperscript{155}

It is worth revisiting here the Lacanian psychoanalytic theory of repetition which framed the discussion of \textit{hamartia} and recursion at the opening of this chapter. In the case of this collective fate neurosis, it is the unconscious collective trauma implied by the historical devaluing of life in the form of the intellectual, ideological and economic subordination, as proven by the literal and figurative violence perpetrated against the populace, whether by institutions of power, belief systems, or economic relations, which functions as \textit{tuché} or as the missed encounter, missed in that it goes unrecognized.\textsuperscript{156} Just as Oedipus was to his own circumstances, there is an overabundance of presence to the experience, that is, the full reality of a given condition cannot be registered because of a temporal location in the now and to a certain enjoyment obtained by those condition (such as the material comforts one enjoys which prevents one from being fully present to one’s oppressive conditions).\textsuperscript{157} The encounter that goes unrecognized, or foundational event of a collective modern subjectivity, is precisely this ever-increasing disassociation from materiality. This trauma, infinitely traumat-_____________________

\textsuperscript{155} See Sigmund Freud, \textit{Beyond the Pleasure Principle}, translated by James Strachey (New York, N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1961). Fate neurosis is discussed by Sigmund Freud in \textit{Beyond the Pleasure Principle} (1920) and denotes a recurrence of unpleasant life events which, though presenting as random misfortunes, actually bear a similarity to one another thus suggesting that the cause lies within individual neurosis and not “malignant fate.” (15)


\textsuperscript{157} As per Belau in “Trauma and the Material Signifier,” Oedipus’s encounter is missed because he is “too present to the experience.” His enjoyment of the incestuous encounter with the mother, makes the experience “unreadable.”
ic because it threatens the structure of our reality since our entrance into the social world, lays the groundwork for Automaton or repetition of cycles of revolt and eventual restoration.\textsuperscript{158} The underlying, abundantly present, unacknowledged substructures which have caused the dissolution of the body and of a material collectivity —Christianity, Enlightenment and Capitalism — the elements of a modern history qua civilizing project whether on political, economical, intellectual and moral grounds, were overlooked as traumatic encounters with the real, causing the repetition of political processes and their aesthetic paradigms without the root causes of collective disenchantment and discord to be acknowledged en masse.

1968

The uprisings of 1968 began less as a political revolt, but more as a student protest against repressive social norms and for greater sexual freedoms. Following growing turmoil at the Nanterre campus of the University of Paris over the right for male and female students to share sleeping quarters, the campus was closed causing a wave of solidarity among students who marched on the Sorbonne demanding greater influence on the educational system. Faced with a brutal backlash by the police, the student cause garnered greater support among the French population, especially from workers outraged at the violent repression, and initiat-


As per Oliver Harris, \textit{Automaton} is “the structural system that engenders repetition and the \textit{tuché} as the trauma which lies behind the repetitive system, driving it; behind what repeats as if by chance. Automaton belongs to the mechanical, deterministic model of existence; \textit{tuché} represents the eruption of something else into it, something unassimilable, beyond the structure of consciousness but whose absence shapes consciousness itself.” Oliver Harris, \textit{Lacan’s Return to Antiquity: Between Nature and Gods} (London, UK: Routledge, 2016), 116.
ed a general strike which practically paralyzed France.\textsuperscript{159} Other members of the professional classes such as lawyers and physicians also joined the strike. With the French economy crippled for several weeks, President Charles de Gaulle called an election (one of the protesters’ demands) which severely impacted the movement’s momentum, with the students refusing to accept resolution through democratic political process. Escalating their resistance, they soon lost public support and de Gaulle was ultimately re-elected in June.\textsuperscript{160}

The events of 1968 were not immune to this tendency towards a historical and aesthetic reach backwards, evident in the erection of barricades and singing of \textit{La Marseillaise} by thirty thousand students gathered beneath the \textit{Arc de Triomphe}, a monument commemorating those who dedicated their lives to France during the French Revolutions and Napoleonic Wars, clear homages to French revolutionary tradition.\textsuperscript{161} The Situationist \textit{dé-tournement} of past revolutionary slogans also bears the mark of nostalgia.\textsuperscript{162} For example, in


\textsuperscript{162} Some of the slogans of 1968 include “La barricade ferme la rue mais ouvre la voie”, referencing the practice of erecting barricades in times of revolt which dates as far back as 1588 when the Catholics of Paris revolted against Henri III. This speaks the retrospective quality of the aesthetics of revolt.
a pamphlet distributed by the *Conseil pour le Maintien des Occupations* in May 1968, a slogan was published which was clearly borrowed from the French Revolution.\(^{163}\) It stated:

“Mankind will not be happy until the last bureaucrat has been hanged with the guts of the last capitalist” and was even transcribed by a student onto an academic painting which hung in the occupied Sorbonne, depicting a crowd of bourgeois academics on the occasion of the addition of the *École Normale Supérieure* into the prestigious French university.\(^{164}\) As Tom McDonough has argued, the defacing of the painting was an act of violent negation not only in its vandalism, but in the desire it expressed to radically eliminate an entire class which was historically responsible for economic oppression. The quote was taken from the previous “Mankind will not be happy until the last aristocrat has been hung with the guts of the last priest” first coined by Abbé Jean Meslier in his *Testament* from 1729 and made famous by Enlightenment thinker Denis Diderot’s *Dithyrambe sur la Fête des Rois* from the 1770s. Both reflect the masses’ vehement desire for the annihilation of institutions and systems from which they sought emancipation and which they hoped would become part of the past. Despite this, as previously expanded upon, past trauma continuously threatens to rupture into the present and thus emerges as a pattern of repetition.

While the events of 1968 were most visible in France, as were the events of 1848, the spirit of unrest and discontent especially among the youth reached far beyond French bor-


ders.\textsuperscript{165} Although Vienna did not produce any large scale mobilizations, it did nevertheless see a radical form of negation in the outburst that was Vienna Actionism, exemplified by the four main protagonists’ work.\textsuperscript{166} In the same way that the French students’ aesthetics of revolt were very much borrowed from a French revolutionary tradition, Actionism’s radical aesthetics were borrowed from aspects of a cultural and revolutionary past, observable in their emphasis on body-focused ritual and aesthetic totalitization. While this brand of Viennese revolt may not have had a global political impact, viewed retrospectively, their work speaks more effectively to the root of mass discontent, a historical and bodily wounding, in a manner more embodied and thus more potent than the uprisings in France.

Considering the historical context previously outlined, the rest of this chapter will examine what I argue to be the sources of this historically contingent collective wound. It will explore how history’s violent civilizing processes; religion, reason and reification have contributed to a dematerialization of subjectivity, an abstraction from individual and collective materiality and the erosion of that materiality’s political significance. The following will also illustrate how the Actionists’ work called attention to this historical wounding and to the subsequent conditions it engendered, which by the 1960s were coming into focus on a global

\textsuperscript{165} This supports further the old expression “whenever France sneezes, the whole world catches a cold.” However we may be able to dub this a distinctly “modern” epidemic as since the Cold War and US economic imperialism, the source of infection has arguably shifted.

\textsuperscript{166} Actionism is not limited to the four figures which are the focus of this text. Many other artists and film makers such as Kurt Kren, Peter Weibel, Adolf Frohner, Arnulf Rainer and Otmar Bauer to name a few participated in the Actions and created their own experimental films. In short, while there was no general strike on the scale of those in Paris, there was nevertheless an aesthetic form of refusal directed against dominant social, cultural and aesthetic norms. Some have argued that Actionism made up for Austria’s “lack of ’68” and demonstrated a definitive commitment to political action on the part of artists. See Gerald Raunig, 188).
scale. With the body as their primary material, I argue that this outburst of radical actions was an act of rebellion and total refusal of the established order of things and the history which shaped it, as well as a call for recognition of the individual and collective alienation from a material truth which has consequently impacted how society and its power structures ultimately value life.

**Religion: Austria, the Body and Repression**

*That there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*

—I Corinthians 12: 25-27

Christianity is a religion of the body. It is on the one hand based on faith in the sacrificial body of the redeemer and on the other hand on the disciplining of the body of the faithful framed as a means toward salvation. Christianity also dominated the western cultural landscape from the mid-fourth century making it, in my view, one of the most important elements to consider in the intellectual, cultural and economic development of the West. It also contributed to the development of both Enlightenment, which was in reaction to the Christian myth, and capitalism whose model of wealth accumulation is preceded by the Catholic Church.\(^{167}\) While the Christianization of the Western world predates the time period under


In the Middle-Ages, the Church accumulated an exorbitant amount of wealth through the sale of indulgences as we all as through land holdings and monasticism. Also, Max Weber sees the roots of capitalism also being grounded in Christianity, though in Protestantism as per his text *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905).
examination in this project, its impact on western individual and collective consciousness can, therefore, not be overlooked. What becomes clear in the use of Christian formal devices in some of the Actionists’ work, is the historical centrality of the body and participation to the means by which community members are bound to each other, an understanding which through thousands of years has become internalized in the West. The impact of secularization, no matter its benefits, combined with mass social and economic shifts experienced during the time period under consideration in this project, gradually eroded the opportunity for and import of communitarian activity. This contributed, I argue, to the communistic exigency that arose in the 1960s. From Hermann Nitsch’s side-wounds, mock crucifixions and invocation of Christian sacrificial and Eucharistic symbols, such as the lamb and the altar, to Schwarzkogler’s more sober re-enactment of Christian matrimonial ritual in Hochzeit, the Christian symbolism in the work occupies a dialectical tension between nostalgic longing for communal ties, guaranteed by ritual action, and the rejection of institutional oppression through the appropriation of its rituals and iconography (much like détournement). The present point regarding the centrality of the body and action as legitimating ‘belonging’ can be extended beyond the Christian model of community. Politics, as the administration of a

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168 For a more detailed analysis on the impact of religion in Austria, see Bischof, Günter, Anton Pelinka and Hermann Denz eds. Religion in Austria: Contemporary Austrian Studies vol. 13. (London, UK: Routledge, 2004). See especially Paul M. Zulehner’s chapter “Religion in Austria.” Austria was a country “steeped in Christendom” which also impacted national identity. At the very onset of the volume the reasons why religion should be considered in any study of Austrian society are enumerated in bullet point form. Some examples, which are germane to this inquiry: Austria for centuries was at the “very core of the Counter-Reformation” and thus was a defender of the catholic faith from a political and social point of view. Because of the Empire’s diverse make-up; religion was a point of division in Austria thus contributing to a collective malaise. Although mass secularization led to withdrawal from communitarian practice, it didn’t have much of an impact on individual religiosity. Despite political neutrality since 1945, there has been “grass roots influence” of Catholicism in political parties such as the Austrian People’s Party. (1-2).
given population, from its very beginnings has also centred on ritual or action such as participation in the *Ecclesia*, the *Panathenaia* or the *Dionysia* for example.\(^{169}\) It is also centred on bodies or the body, whether the bodies of citizens or the divinely appointed body of the King. This point is argued poignantly by Giorgio Agamben in his work on sovereign power and bare life where he argues, against Foucault, that sovereign power, in its ability to place life in a “state of exception.” has always been biopolitical, a point which will be further explored in Chapter III.\(^{170}\)

Of the four main protagonists of Actionism, Hermann Nitsch’s work most directly references Christianity, both in form and content. Fascinated by the intensity of works such as Matthias Grunewald’s *Isenheim Altarpiece* from 1516, with its visceral conveyance of Christ’s bodily suffering on the Cross as a means to elicit *compassio*, an affective pious re-

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\(^{169}\) The *Ecclesia* was the Athenian popular assembly in which any citizen (males over the age of 20) could participate. It was the centre of Athenian democracy and political life. The term was adopted by the Church to designate the Community or *Ecclesia Universalis*, to which ones belonging was guaranteed through ritual participation in the Eucharist and outside of which there was no possibility for salvation. Here, aesthetically and in name, the Church repeated a form of administration and cultural belonging, stemming from a glorified past (the Roman Empire and the Greek Dionysia centred on the tragic event) which was based on a form of inclusion which, objectively speaking, was defined by virtue of who it excluded (Barbarians and Heretics).

The *Panathenaia* and the *Dionysia* were important festivals including theatrical performances of Athenian tragedies and later in the fifth century BC, comedies. Attendance and participation was an important part of civic life by Honouring the Gods and through the collective experience of catharsis provoked by pity and suffering felt due to the *agon* portrayed in the Tragedy.


The “state of exception” refers to sovereign power’s ability to place a life outside the law, where it is included within the juridicial order by virtue of its exclusion. That life can therefore be killed without consequence but not sacrificed.
Nitsch’s work reflects a morbid fascination with the visual vernacular of Christianity as well as the intensity of the Christ Event and the means by which the faithful ritually engaged with it. By this I mean the Crucifixion, packaged as Christ’s painful and human self-sacrifice for the redemption of mankind’s sins. Christianity, which dominated not only the political landscape of the West, but also the everyday lived experience of its people, is a belief system centred on the sacrificial human body. As a community, it is rooted in the ritual re-enactment of that sacrifice through the Eucharist, as well as constant penance in order to pay the daily accruing debt of sin, an affront to the Saviour’s sacrifice which would result in eternal bodily torment in the afterlife. The lamb, one of the earliest symbols used for representing both Christ, as well as his sacrifice, was used by Nitsch in Die Blutorgel, Nitsch’s 7th painting action enacted in collaboration with Otto Muehl in June of 1962. The three-day event, in which the artists had sequestered themselves in a cellar only to allow the public to see the end result, included the nailing of a lamb carcass as though crucified onto a cloth-covered wall which served as a substitution for the canvas. The lamb, as well as its entrails, were beaten to allow liquids to spew forth onto the cloth. The event, which was in “protest against the reactionary state of contemporary Austrian art,” not only disrupted the modernist trajectory of painting by breaking with the confines of the medium but also, the

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171 The Isenheim Altarpiece was commissioned for the Monastery of St. Anthony in Isenheim, in Alsace, France. The Antonine monks were a hospitallier order who treated victims of the plague and ergotism.

172 The fact that the crucifixion was painful was of utmost importance to Medieval Christian doctrine as pain proved Christ’s humanity within Christological debates and thus secured the redemption of man’s sins, often described in terms of a debt to God. Christ, being the most perfect human being due to his divinity, was the only one who could take on that sacrifice. See Donald Mowbray, Pain and Suffering in Medieval Theology: Academic Debates at the University of Paris in the Thirteenth Century (Suffolk, UK: Boydell & Brewer, Boydell Press, 2009).

The event was abreactive, much like the Aristotelian concept of catharsis experienced by the audience witnessing the \textit{agon} of the Athenian tragedy. The lamb, as well as the crucifixion motif, continued to feature prominently in Nitsch’s subsequent actions as well as the side-wound, which at times appear as a cut on the flank of an animal carcass and at others as a line drawn and encircled on a human body. It has also appeared bandaged, smeared with fluid to mimic blood gushing forth from it to collect into a pile of offal over the body’s genitals. The side-wound also figures prominently in Nitsch’s writing, particularly in two treatise, \textit{On the Symbolism of the Side Wound} and \textit{On the Sensual Reality of the Side Wound}. The first text dating from 1964, attempts a psychoanalytical reading of the side-wound through Freud and is part of a full length play called \textit{King Oedipus}.\footnote{Green, \textit{Writings of the Vienna Actionists}, 153.} Nitsch views the side-wound, often displayed in art, especially in the medieval period, as a gaping slit or within which a doubting Thomas inserts his finger, as a “symbolic representation of female genitals,” thus displaying “the generally repressed incest wish…transformed into the collective-neurotic mythical self
punishment, as represented by death on the Cross.”\textsuperscript{175} Nitsch grounds a collective body-focused neurosis in the redemptive promise offered by the salvific body of the Redeemer. In his later text, Nitsch attributes the significance of the side-wound in his actions and in the Christian narrative to its sensuousness, its very stuff-ness, by speaking of the intense reaction produced by “soft moist flesh being opened up,” triggering the connotation of pain and the “basic sensual stimuli that can be triggered by realities.”\textsuperscript{176} Crucially, the side-wound is that which theologically gave birth to the Christian community in terms of the side-wound’s function as proof of Christ’s humanity and thus of the redemptive quality of his death. Aesthetically, through its portrayal in art during the Middle Ages, it visually conveyed this narrative and contributed to the formation of the \textit{Ecclesia Universalis}. A miniature from a French Bible \textit{Moralisée} dating from 1225CE Christ is seen on the Cross, giving birth to the Church from his side wound. Furthermore, this image is directly below a register which depicts the birth of Eve from Adam’s rib. Here a teleological link is drawn from the creation of Man, the Fall and ultimately Man’s redemption, all of which hinge upon enfleshing, or rather the flesh and finite materiality of the body. The sensuousness Nitsch attributes to the side-wound is thus inherited from its discursive, aesthetic and affective construction as “life giving,” and therefore its conflation with female genitalia is not entirely uncommon as its pictorial render-

This is not an entirely unorthodox reading of the side wound as in the Middle Ages, it was often the focus of intense and embodied devotional experience, at times expressed in sensual terms, and depicted in imagery in isolation as a large gash. See Jeffery F. Hamburger, \textit{The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany} (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998) and C. W. Bynum, \textit{Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion} (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).

ing as an isolated and enlarged “ecstatic orifice, an inviting point of entry and communion between the soul and the divine” during the Middle Ages can attest. Nitsch’s subsequent works, all gradually shaping into what would become his *Orgies Mysterien Theatre*, evolved to include more concrete references to institutional ritual such as the altar, the chalice, blood and mock crucifixion. The works compel the viewer to confront the institutional administration and distribution of myth in modernity, and our reliance on it at a time when the experience of community, which religion had provided, had increasingly withdrawn from everyday life. Hundreds of years of collective and embodied psychical investment in the sacrificial body and the salvation of the soul has shaped a mass body-focused anxiety — as the material from which salvation is either compromised through sin, or guaranteed through penance — as well as a corrosive collective morality, which continues to permeate the unconscious life of secularized society, a condition and historical reality that Nitsch’s work compels us to confront. That is, the paradoxical condition implied by the vacuum the withdrawal from communitarian religion has left behind on the one hand and the oppressive morality it inculcated into a western collective unconscious on the other. This reality, as well as Christianity’s historical, and arguably continued entwinement with Western politics demands a return to the previous discussion of Nancy’s work as well as to the notion of Community qua modern political project as a means of quelling a communalist exigency in society. Christianity would fall vic-

177 David S. Areford, “Printing the Side Wound of Christ in *The Viewer and the Printed Image in Late Medieval Europe* (New York and London: Routledge, 2016), 228–267. 231. In reference to the conflation of the side wound with the vagina, Areford provides a helpful summary of the latest state of the discourse, saying: “several scholars have explored the erotic, gendered and psychological aspects of these images, interpreting the side wound as a not-so-veiled substitute for the vagina” and that much of these interpretations are based on medieval mysticism and devotional texts. (230).
tim to the pitfalls of totalitarian community suggested by Nancy. Valuable in the immediacy of collective belonging it appears to offer members and in terms of the intimacy and reciprocity it provides, this intimacy, creating a sense of identity as basis of that attachment, opens up the potential for violence and exclusion. This capacity for brutality stems from this form of community’s grounding in “intimate communication between its members” and “its organic communion with its own essence.”

It is constituted, as per Nancy, by the impregnation of an identity by a plurality wherein each member identifies himself only through the supplementary mediation of his identification with the living body of the community. In the motto of the Republic, *fraternity* designates community: the model of the family and love.\(^{179}\)

In the Christian myth, this living body of the community is not only its members, but Christ himself. Belonging to the community depends on one’s belief and embodied participation in the ritual reenactment of His bodily sacrifice. Within the context of the modern bourgeois state, which sought to replace the hegemony of the Christian myth and its divinely appointed monarch with a democratic model of civic participation and sought to nostalgically recapture the glory of the Ancient Republic, the living body of the community, the labourer, was put to work through the prioritization of production. Conversely, and as a response to the exploitative nature of the bourgeois state, the cohesion enforced by state-run Communism, much like Christianity and Fascism, is a communion with the plurality’s own essence, whether it be labour or sacrificial death. In these models of operative communities, there is a turning in-

\(^{178}\) Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 9.

\(^{179}\) Ibid.
ward, obstructing the truly social character of humanity and the possibility for a being-in-
common, a relation between finite beings, finite in that “being finite means being concerned
with or encountering one’s limit, and hence being turned inside out.”^180 Finitude in this case
refers to the impossibility of truly being alone (because we can never be alone being alone),
as well as the reality of our own finite materiality; the encounter with our limits which essen-
tially resides at the level of the body and which, when revealed and shared without gainful
intent, gives rise to the possibility of an unworked community or one divorced from a form
of economic exchange.^181 Nitsch here is engaging with the sacrificial foundations of Chris-
tianity and its nature as a community which puts death to work, though in his exaltation of
the sharing of sensual experiences, in its formal display of unproductive expenditure, I un-
derstand his work as attempting a turning outward of Christianity’s violent, immanent
nature.^182

The centrality of the body to Christianity is not only limited to sacrificial ritual and
participation as legitimization of belonging. Its conflicting doctrine of the body, presented as

^180 Morin, Jean-Luc Nancy, 76.

^181 Ibid., 78-79.
For more see Morin, Jean-Luc Nancy, 76-79 and Nancy, Inoperative Community, 4.

^182 This goes back to Nancy’s criticism of nostalgia when thinking of community or of the withdrawal
of the sacred. He also resists any model of community that makes a project out of death whereby
death or sacrifice serves as a means to bind the community. There is a gain to the loss of Christ’s life,
or those of Saints as intercessors, around which revolves the eternal salvation of community mem-
ers. Nazism, in the same fashion, hinged its project on “the sacrifice of German blood for the purifi-
cation of the race and in order to build a community that would be the immanence of a shared essence
or identity united or held together by a singular principle” (Morin, Jean-Luc Nancy 81). In this way,
Christianity, with its dictatorial authoritarianism, violent suppression of opposing views visible in the
crusades and witch hunts as well as its focus on economic and political control (especially visible in
the Middle-Ages and the Renaissance) is non-governmental fascist immanence par excellence.
at once salvific and sinful, ingrained into the collective unconscious over hundreds of years of ideological domination, has instilled a moralistic and dematerializing dualism which pre-dates that inculcated by the Cartesian split. Returning briefly to my introduction to this text and to the unpacking of the term *hamartia* from its original Aristotelian interpretation to its re-articulation in Pauline theology, I wish to remind the reader of *hamartia*’s shift from referencing a tragic error to man’s inherent sinful nature directly related to the flesh or *sarx*. In this context, the flesh refers to the natural body and its susceptibility to libidinal drives. As the source of sin, these libidinal drives are in opposition to the will of God and thus present an impasse to salvation. In the Epistle to the Romans, perhaps his most influential text, St-Paul states:

> For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the rites requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accidence with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.¹⁸³

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The duality between body and spirit here is clear and this becomes important to consider as far as its broader consequences on subjectivity, or rather its dematerialization, within Western collective consciousness in the wake of the Christianization of the Western world.

The body within Christian doctrine occupies a very ambivalent position which came sharply into focus in the Middle Ages. It was the very material which made a person vulnerable to sin (as per the flesh or *sарx*), the stakes being eternal damnation or thousands of years spent in purgatory, but was also crucial for the re-enfleshing at the End of Days when souls would be reunited with their own physical bodies.\(^\text{184}\) There was, therefore, a certain sacrality to the individual body as it was part of a person’s individual identity, though it also had to be constantly disciplined and purified as it posed a threat to one’s salvation.\(^\text{185}\) While the body was inherently sinful, Christianity hinged upon the enfleshing of God in the person of Jesus Christ. In other words, within Christian doctrine, the body occupied conflicting positions; while the flesh must continuously be resisted, purified and disciplined, it was only through the body (one’s own and the Redeemer’s) that one could attain salvation.\(^\text{186}\) The body was also placed in opposition to the Spirit, which is constantly engaged in battle with the libidinal drives of the flesh. This belief system, while alienating the individual from the physical self,


\[^{185}\text{The study of the Middle Ages also offers us an opportunity to reconsider a linear model of time. Looking at the sculptural program of the Royal portal of Chartres Cathedral conveys this whereby each portal features elements of both Christological time and secular time, both having an impact on the most important aspect of Christian life; everlasting life after death.}\]

also became a means of social control, the fear of damnation guaranteeing that the community police themselves as well as each other.  

Beyond the impact such a conflicting body-focused belief system has had on the individual and the collective, and as mentioned at the onset of this section, Catholicism specifically has played a significant role in Austrian political history especially during the Modern period. In the nineteenth century, when the myth of the nation began to ignite the passions of much of Europe and usurp the influence of religion, Austria had to contend with a much more complex cultural landscape.  

The already growing divisiveness between nationalistic sentiment and religiosity was exacerbated in the broader Austrian historical context by the cultural diversity of its territories, as well as its Protestant/Catholic history.

Throughout its complex history, the Austrian State has been greatly invested in the maintenance and protection of the Christian faith even while it sought to diminish the Church’s official role in politics. Thus despite the great political changes experienced by the Austrian territories from the late eighteenth century to the end of the second World War, its identity has long been tethered to its Catholic faith and thus to a repressive belief system, which not only divided the self along material and spiritual lines, but also divided the Em-

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187 For more on this see Sylvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2004). The witch hunts are an example of this form of policing and social control targeting the body specifically. In this case, the female body was the target of religious discipline.

pire’s diverse population, already plagued by ethnic tension, along the lines of sectarian religious belonging.

Regardless of the gradual withdrawal of the Austrian Church from political affairs, the protection of the spiritual and moral health of the Austrian people continued to be a matter of political importance as had been the preservation of Christian nationhood, evidenced by the rise of the Christian social movement after 1848 and the popularity of the Christian Social Party from its inception in 1891 to 1934, the Austro-fascist Fatherland Front from 1933-1938 and of the Austrian People’s Party following the end of the Anschluss. In sum, Austrian national identity and collective consciousness cannot be considered apart from its strong Christian foundations. The consequences of even greater secularization in the years following World War II, in a country already plagued by a damaged and confused sense of national identity especially among the younger generation, would arguably have been more impactful than in countries where the division between nation and religion had occurred long before. Paul M. Zulehner has offered a valuable assessment and statistical overview of the Austrian religious landscape from the end of WWII onwards indicating that while in 1968 Austria did not experience mass uprisings such as in France, its revolution was nevertheless impactful. It consisted rather of a cultural revolution that saw the gradual withdrawal from

institution-led communitarian religion, towards forms of private religiosity or a general decline in the submission to religious authority especially from the 1970s onwards.190

The Actionists, therefore, having grown up in a culture defined in part by its Catholic identity and political conservatism, a cultural and political backdrop which ultimately led to Austria’s complicity in the Holocaust, deployed aspects of the oppressor's aesthetic language as a means to exorcise centuries of submission. Using the formal languages of sacrifice and ritual, employing organic material substances (such as bread and wine which are not traditional artistic material and reference the Eucharistic ritual) and centring much of the work on the body or bodies, at once the focus of devotion, the very instrument of worship and locus of institutional discipline, some of the Actionists' works, Nitsch's more specifically, expose forms of indoctrination while trying to exorcise them through subversive action.

Conversely, these formal tactics, enacted in the midst of partisan political failure (National Socialism vs Stalinist Communism), in the aftermath of a humanitarian disaster and within the void left behind by secularization, also demonstrate a longing for community, for a reciprocal means of being-in-common which, as per Nancy’s argument in The Inoperative Community, has never actually existed in the manner in which politics has imagined it. The Actionists, therefore, find themselves within a specific dialectical tension between the legacies of Enlightenment and Romanticism, between rebellion against forms of administered bureaucratic socialism driven by a rational recognition of their oppressive nature, and a long-

190 For more on religion in Austria see Paul M. Zulehner, “Religion in Austria” in Religion in Austria Contemporary Austrian Studies vol. 13, 36-62.
ing for a more concrete and embodied relation between the self, the other and the lived environment.

**Reason: The Enlightenment and the Dematerialization of the Subject**

*From now on, matter was finally to be controlled without the illusion of immanent powers or hidden properties. For enlightenment, anything which does not conform to the standard of calculability and utility must be viewed with suspicion. Once the movement is able to develop unhampered by external oppression, there is no holding it back. Its own ideas of human rights then fare no better than the older universals.*

- Adorno/Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947)

Oedipus went to great lengths to avoid fulfilling the prophecy which predicted that he would commit patricide and enter into an incestuous relationship with his mother. He left Corinth, very reasonably it would seem, and managed to ascend to the throne of Thebes using rational thought to solve the Sphinx’s riddle while spurning the Chorus for pleading to the Gods for deliverance.\(^{191}\) Conversely, despite his prideful use of reason and his truth-seeking quest for knowledge, Oedipus consistently looks to the Gods to solve the mystery of his birth. Oedipus’s downfall embodies the dialectical pull between superstitious belief and rational thought, as well as the dangers presented by “blind” faith in each. The dangerous potential presented by reason’s blind fidelity to its own internal logic was also exposed by Adorno and Horkheimer following National Socialism. They viewed the Holocaust as the combination of indiscriminate reason and technological advancement deployed towards the systematization of mass murder as part of political policy. As such, and summarized by

Adorno’s pointing to the barbarism of poetry after Auschwitz, the state-led genocide signalled the death nell of modernity's narrative of progress and a condemnation of the Western culture and history which created it, more specifically, the Enlightenment.192

How then did an intellectual project which championed emancipation and equality among men (I use the term “men” here literally as women were not considered in this quest for equality, nor were they considered as equal to men by the civilizations which inspired this enlightened humanism which speaks to its inherent flaws) lead to the bloodshed of the Reign of Terror and the June days of 1848? How can reason and nationalistic ideals lead to violence perpetrated by the state and supported by citizens in the name of said state? The answer to this must extend past the familiar trope of the irrational character of pure reason. The bodily works of the Actionists, the calculated nature of many of their actions, their transgression of sexual taboos and, in some cases, their display of problematic authoritative power relations, reflect an unconscious desire to call attention to the legacy of Enlightenment thinking, in some instances through its emulation and in others through rejection of its values. Kunst und Revolution, for example, mocks Enlightenment’s replacement of the Gods with the myth of representational politics, while ironically, the Actionists’ blindness to their own privileged position as male artists is exposed in many of their actions with the use of seemingly passive female participants, which only perpetuates the myth of the superiority of the Caucasian male intellect.193 Furthermore, as a manifestation of an exigency for reconciliation with the body’s

192 See Adorno and Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment, (2002).

193 I do not intend to deny the female participants in the Actionists’ works of any agency in suggesting this. However History and the unequal power relations it nurtured in relation to sexual difference and gender must be considered and will be further unpacked in the next chapters.
materiality, Actionism shines a light on an underlying cause of a collective malaise; the subject’s dematerialization and the subsequent devaluation of life, which was becoming impossible to ignore at that particular historical juncture in the 1960s. By this I mean a cultural and intellectual/discursive process, whereby the body has been theorized and rationalized as being a subordinate entity to the rational faculties of the mind. While this already had begun with Christianity’s pinning of the soul against the body, along with the Enlightenment’s dispelling of superstitious myth and rationalization of the mind’s superiority over the body with the Cartesian split (Descartes’s influence on modern philosophy and thus to the shaping of a modern worldview being beyond question), the very state of being became independent from material existence, that is, the body had no bearing on existence and therefore, on subjectivity. This lack of significance given to any material grounding to being or personhood which laid the foundations of modern ontological and epistemological discourse is, I argue, a violent process of dematerialization.

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194 I would like to remind the reader of the context of this historical moment which included the aftermath of the Holocausts and the Bomb, and in the midst of the war in Vietnam, and the Civil Rights movement. All of which either represent a tremendous loss of life or struggles systemic to marginalization based on bodily difference.

195 In his most influential text, Part Four of the *Discourse on Method* (1637), Descartes says: "And noticing that this truth— I think, therefore I am (cogito ergo sum)—was so firm and so assured that all the most extravagant suppositions of the skeptics were incapable of shaking it, I judged that I could accept it without scruple as the first principle of the philosophy I was seeking (…) and seeing that I could pretend that I had no body and that there was no world nor any place where I was, I could not pretend, on that account, that I did not exist at all, and that, on the contrary, from the very fact that I thought of doubting the truth of other things, it followed very evidently and very certainly that I existed…From this I knew that I was a substance the whole essence or nature of which is simply to think, and which, in order to exist, has no need of any place nor depends on any material thing. Thus this “I”, that is to say, the soul through which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body and is even easier to know than the body, and even if there were no body at all, it would not cease to be all that it is...” René Descartes, “A Discourse on Method,” *Project Gutenberg*. Release July 1, 2008. Accessed September, 2017. [http://www.gutenberg.org/files/59/59-h/59-h.htm#part4](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/59/59-h/59-h.htm#part4)
In Günter Brus’s 1965 painting action, *Selbstverstümmelung*, made in collaboration with experimental film maker Kurt Kren, the artist is seen lying on the floor, his body painted white and fading into the monochrome background. The silent film documenting the work cuts from one close-cropped frame to the next, centred on the artist’s pained facial expressions. Various implements appear in the frame; a razor blade, a corkscrew, small scissors and a sharp-ended crow bar positioned as though it is piercing into his temple causing a strip of dark paint to drip down his face and neck. Brus then pulls at the thick, globbing, impasto-like paint covering the ground and his head in a manner which emulates agony while frustrating the division between figure and ground. He rips at it as though tearing off a layer of skin. A dismembered foot, then a hand, are seen next to his head, making it appear in the camera frame as though they are severed from his body. The film goes on, with the artist looking increasingly vulnerable, tortured, mutilated. Both a historical and art historical trajectory are being addressed in this work, or rather the internal crisis to which history has led the individual and the art historical manifestation of said crisis in painting. Both the Enlightenment and the modernist project, or at least its dominant formalist interpretation, have been hostile toward the fleshy, material body and with this work, there is an aesthetic acting out of the body’s existence under extreme duress within both an intellectual and material history, and within painting. Here the body returns, in the aftermath of the debates between figuration and abstraction, and in order to do so, it violently asserts that which forced its dismissal; its fleshy materiality.

In his text, *Against Voluptuous Bodies: Late Modernism and the Meaning of Painting*, J.M. Bernstein argues
Art's autonomy … is not the achievement of art's securing for itself a space free from the interference of social or political utility, but a consequence and so an expression of the fragmentation and reification of modern life. Autonomy is not a reflective categorical accomplishment but art’s expulsion from everyday life… Once expelled and aware of that expulsion, art then is forced to interrogate what is left to it.\(^{196}\)

Bernstein views art’s modernist self-reflexive turn to be a result of an exclusion from the quotidian and its rationalized normative ideals.\(^{197}\) Rather than art retreating from “social and political utility” of its own accord, its withdrawal is understood as being due to its incommensurability with a modern life whose practice was no longer tied to sensuous, embodied experience, lending obsolescence to representation.\(^{198}\) Art’s expulsion, therefore gave rise to its need to authorize itself through ontological interrogation.\(^{199}\) Bernstein, at the outset of his text, sets up a dialectical tension between the dissolution of the sensuous world to its mathematical substructure and painting’s gradual binding to its own internal logic, positing that logic as an alternative to enlightened modernity’s estrangement from the natural world. While Bernstein makes a convincing argument pertaining to the dialectical relationship between the intellectual foundation of the conditions of modern life and modernism’s increased grappling with the medium’s own inner logic, I suggest it to be less of a causal relationship, or a coun-

\(^{196}\) Bernstein, *Against Voluptuous Bodies*, 3.

\(^{197}\) Bernstein, *Against Voluptuous Bodies*, 3.

\(^{198}\) Ibid.

\(^{199}\) Ibid.
tering, than a mirroring. The gradual dissolution of the figure in art is reflective of an intellectual trajectory which eroded the significance of materiality to subjectivity. This suggestion, therefore, does not entirely negate a representational element to modern art. That is, modern art’s gradual retreat from formal representation is, in itself, representative of the intellectual history and material conditions underlying the modern condition. That is, while the invention of photography, industrialization’s radical impact on daily life as well as the modern artist’s revolt against academic conventions, also contributed to modern painting’s increased self-reflexivity, there is nonetheless a parallel to be found between the reduction of the material world to quantitative data, real abstraction and the reification of social relations under capital, and the development of abstraction in painting. The dissolution of the figure and of the natural world of embodied human experience in painting, is representative of the body and embodiment’s fate under enlightenment and within the social and economic conditions it engendered. They share the erosion of the sensuous world, to use Bernstein’s words, the ground zero of which is the voluptuous body. This threefold move toward abstraction, intellectual/discursive, economic and formal, is the aesthetic and social spectre haunting the

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200 For more on real abstraction see Theodor Adorno, *Introduction to Sociology*, ed. Christoph Gödde, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002). In *Introduction to Sociology*, Adorno discusses real abstraction: “In developed societies...exchange takes place...through money as the equivalent form. Classical [bourgeois] political economy demonstrated, as did Marx in his turn, that the true unit which stands behind money as the equivalent form is the average necessary amount of social labour time, which is modified, of course, in keeping with the specific social relationships governing the exchange. In this exchange in terms of average social labour time the specific forms of the objects to be exchanged are necessarily disregarded instead, they are reduced to a universal unit. The abstraction, therefore, lies not in the thought of the sociologist, but in society itself.” (31-32)

201 There is a commonality between real and formal abstraction in regards to the erosion of the body, its gradual disappearance whether in paint or via the wage. While the general equivalent reflects the value contained in commodities, translating the productive forces of the body into an object that is quantifiable, formal abstraction reduces the representational quality of painting to its material truth; paint and support. Both labour and figuration, thus the body, are gradually rendered invisible.
historical time period under investigation in relation to its implications in the disintegration of social ties and their wider political ramifications.

Bernstein’s investigation begins with Descartes’s “dissolution of the sensible world” as a critical moment in the development of Western thought.202 He states, regarding Descartes’s meditations on a piece of wax: “having the familiar world of the senses first liquify and then disappear into mathematical knowing is a fable for the fate of things in the modern world, and by extension a fable of modernity itself with which we have yet to get on level terms.”203 The Cartesian split amounted to the elevation of the faculties of the rational mind above the sensory experience provided by the body as the most reliable means of gaining knowledge from, and forming judgements about, the outside world. *Cogito ergo Sum* eroded the significance of the body, of sentient experience, to the means by which we acquire knowledge and to our very subjectivity. It thus reduced the body to an inconsequential automata.204 Furthermore, the reduction of the world to quantitative data implies a distrust of the body, of the senses, instinct and feeling, as reliable means of gaining knowledge of the


204 Ironically, this disregard for the body, meaning the material body having no bearing on a person’s “value” or intellectual capacity, historically only seems to have applied to white males. Those who physically do not fit this description have been oppressed precisely because of their body: skin colour or gender. It is important to stress that it is only the body of the white male that could be rationally dismissed, and only the white male who was truly capable of rational thought. The body of the “other” was inextricably linked to their inferiority and was the reason behind the rationalization of their oppression.
Distrust towards the body’s capacity to reliably gain information from the external world is fundamentally Kantian. The splitting of the world into phenomena and noumena resulted in the notion that the truth about the “thing in itself” can never be apprehended because our perception and projected interpretation (representation/idea) from what is grasped by our senses and synthesized by the brain is but a mere idea of the object’s true properties. For example our eyes are incapable of seeing infrared rays and colour does not exist. Colour is simply the way in which light interacts with an object’s surface. Reality then can never be truly known, because our bodies act as mediators between the object and our subjective experience/understanding of that object.

Here, compassion is that which combats egotism. For more see Mathijs Peters, *Schopenhauer and Adorno on Bodily Suffering: A Comparative Analysis* (United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
with him, in other words, that this entire difference between me and everyone else, which is the very basis of my egoism, is eliminated, to a certain extent at least… However the process here analyzed is not one that is imagined or invented… It is the everyday phenomenon of compassion, of the immediate participation, independent of all ulterior considerations, primarily in the suffering of another and thus in the prevention and elimination of it…

Schopenhauer’s argument hinges on a libidinal drive which compels us to engage with the suffering of our fellow man; awareness of the body as something we inhabit—as a physical object in the world and thus as an integral part of subjectivity—is partly due to the fact that we experience emotions, pleasure and pain. Compassion necessarily has a corporeal grounding as “an intuitive recognition that we are all manifestations of the will to live” and thus so too does that which binds the collective.

Considering this, how, in the twentieth century, could much of Europe ignore, and in Austria’s case participate in, the extermination of the European Jews? The task of addressing these historical failures in the aftermath of World War II was taken up by members of the Frankfurt School, Adorno and Horkheimer in particular, who argued for a consideration of a modern narrative in which the power of progress ultimately led to the unimpeded progress of

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power, culminating in the Holocaust, proof of modernity’s failure as a civilizing project. While I would not suggest that this inquiry subscribes to this linear approach, the Enlightenment’s uncritical championing of reason, its privileging of knowledge which is arguably only reserved for an enlightened few, coupled with the rise of the bourgeois state as an external apparatus of control, has had a hand in the justification of and subsequent submission to state-led violence, whether physical, economical or judicial, a condition which the Actionists, struggling with their nation’s complicity, were literally acting upon.

Günter Brus’s self-painting and self-mutilation actions dating from 1964-65 all feature the artist painted white from head to toe. As previously mentioned, Brus here acts as both painting and support, expanding the medium’s usual restrictive parameters into the third dimension, the dimension of sculpture, and thus flying in the face of the modernist narrative’s privileging of medium specificity. Two separate points are of interest in this work, the conflation of the body with the traditional mediums of painting and sculpture, as well as the allusion to self-inflicted violence. I have already addressed the issue of painting, the assertion of the body’s materiality in the aftermath of formal abstraction’s mirroring of the dissolution of the body and sensible world with the erosion of the figure. While Brus’s body emerges as both the figure and the ground, disrupting modernism’s closely guarded boundaries, the work bleeds into the realm of sculpture not only because of its three dimensionality, but by virtue of the white, male figure itself, an archetype of classical statuary. The significance of this is twofold. The actions, in their display of self-inflicted violence through camera shots which make the sculptural body seem fragmented, point to the aesthetics of the philosophical and

political foundations upon which modernity was built, and to the instability of those foundations as ultimately proven (as argued by Adorno and Horkheimer) by National Socialism whose aesthetics, exemplified by the works of Arno Breker and Paul Troost, emulated the same classical model while speaking directly to the Reich’s claim of racial superiority.\textsuperscript{211} The violence inherent in this philosophical and political discourse, which debated the superiority of pure reason, arguably engendered a historical unfolding which rationalized the supremacy of the European male intellect as well as the myth of the sacrality of ethnic nationhood or \textit{völkisch} community which filled the void that religion had left behind. This philosophical and political movement while seeming to be a means of emancipation from aristocratic and quasi-theocratic rule, simply re-inscribed methods of domination and alienation by other means.\textsuperscript{212} These conditions and the pressure they have exerted on bodies, magnified in Austria after World War II due to its crimes of complicity, as well as Vienna’s place at the nexus of a particular form of mythical modernism and intellectual interest in the body’s libidinal drives, are both exposed and made literal in their enactment of violence and submission in Brus’s series of masochistic self-explorations.

Similarly, Rudolph Schwarzkogler’s oeuvre and life seem to mirror the conflict set up by the rational pursuit of “mastery of life”\textsuperscript{213} and self-destructive potential brought on by

\textsuperscript{211} Henri Grosshans, \textit{Hitler and the Artists} (Teaneck, NJ:Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1983). Grosshans states that Hitler preferred Classical art as it was “uncontaminated by Jewish influence” as he believed various modernist trends had been. (86).

\textsuperscript{212} Regarding Enlightenment, Adorno and Horkheimer claim: “Not only is domination paid for with the estrangement of human beings form the dominated object, but the relationships of human beings, including the relationship of human beings to themselves, have themselves been bewitched by the objectification of the mind.” (\textit{Dialectic of Enlightenment}, 21).

\textsuperscript{213} Hermann Nitsch on Rudolf Schwarzkogler in Green, \textit{Writings of the Vienna Actionists},181.
unwittingly submitting to oppressive conditions. In a text written on Schwarzkogler, Hermann Nitsch writes that while he himself erred toward the Dionysian in his artistic output, the Apollonian principle was Schwarzkogler’s guideline.\textsuperscript{214} The dialectical tension between these two principles reflect the problem set, between history and nature, as well as the uncritical cultural, political and philosophical philhellenism plaguing Western politics and discourse which has contributed to the conditions under examination in this text. Nietzsche argued that art (from his examination of greek culture and tragedy) was bound up within the aforementioned duality: the Apollonian referencing sculpture, the Dionysian referencing music. Aesthetically, the sculptural qualities of Brus’s \textit{Selbstbemalung} and \textit{Selbstverstümmelung} as well as Schwarzkogler’s \textit{Aktion 3} and \textit{Aktion 6}, reflect Nietzsche’s proposed dialectic.\textit{Aktion 3} and \textit{Aktion 6}, dating from 1965 and 1966 respectively, both use the body in a more sculptural fashion in comparison to the painterly material actions of his counterparts Muehl and Nitsch. In \textit{Aktion 3}, Heinz Cibulka submits to precisely outlined configurations. He is at times bandaged and blind folded; sitting upright or lying down; with razor blades placed on his body or wires coming out from under the bandages; he is captured naked with a large fish hanging from his back and, sitting on a white sphere with his penis bandaged and then crumpled on the floor with black stains seen on his bandaged penis.\textsuperscript{215} \textit{Aktion 6} features much of the same aesthetic principles, however the action is self-inflicted with Schwarzkogler as the actor, bound up in gauze bandage from head to toe. It also features two dead chickens, one of which has a lightbulb inserted in his stomach, with electric cables binding the chicken’s feet.

\textsuperscript{214} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{215} The reader can consult the entire action score in Green, \textit{Writings of the Vienna Actionists}, 189-193.
and at times connecting the chicken’s beak to the actor’s mouth, together with a blacked out mirror which the artist stares into. Both actions share some of the same masochistic and sculptural aesthetic components as Brus’s previously mentioned actions, however in this case the works tread the line between the human body passively being acted upon and the human body as the agent acting upon his environment. The actions appear more methodical and contained, as opposed to Brus’s looser composition and unbridled display of pathos in Selbstver-stümmelung for example. At the opening of The Birth of Tragedy (1872), Nietzsche speaks of the aforementioned opposing poles of artistic creation as rivalling energies, acting as the substructure of man’s lived experience: calculated restraint and emotional drunkenness. He says: “We must keep in mind that measured restraint, that freedom from the wilder emotions, that philosophical calm of the sculptor-god…we might consider Apollo himself as the glorious divine image of the principium individuationis.” The concept of principium individuationis is borrowed from his mentor Schopenhauer, who in The World as Will and Representation (1819), uses the term to describe our ability to differentiate objects from one another and order them according to our understanding of our environment. It also refers to our belief that this principle of individuation provides us with reliable information on the outside world. However, Schopenhauer contends that this principle of individuation provides us with an illusory understanding of our environment, because the truth ultimately lies in the whole to which each individual element inter-relates. The old idiom “one cannot see the forest for the trees” comes to mind, also illustrating aspects of the hamartia in question. By invoking the

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principium individuationis as a means to describe the Apollonian drive, Nietzsche means the realm of rational ordering, of singularities and appearances which in other words is that of Enlightenment. The Dionysian, on the other hand, emerges at the very collapse of this ordering principle. It is equated with nature, with an ecstasy that “causes the subjective to vanish into complete self-forgetfulness.”\textsuperscript{217} Returning to Schwarzkogler’s \textit{Action 6}, there is, I argue, a tension between individuation and recognition of its illusory nature. The Apollonian principium individuationis is manifest in the sober aesthetics and methodical execution, as well as in the self-containment and individuation expressed through his physical binding. In contrast, the black mirror which Schwarzkogler gazes into provides no reflection and occludes narcissistic self-awareness, while the physical and metaphorical linking of the subject with the dead chickens through the use of the wire and stethoscope, speaks to an understanding of an interconnectedness between individuals and the natural world, which he is also trying to mediate through technological and scientific means. The action aesthetically conveys Enlightenment’s ironic lack of self-awareness.

The methodical and calculated nature of reason, the manner in which the state and individuals have continued to harness it as a means to preserve rationalized beliefs in self, nation or clan is mirrored in Schwarzkogler’s meticulous interaction with his environment and the quasi scientific approach to the objects within it, especially the chickens whose deaths serve no other purpose than to be a means to the action’s ends. I do not mean here to suggest that Schwarzkogler’s actions are an internalization of fascism, but rather an aesthetic expression of Enlightenment’s inner workings. Enlightenment stripped bare and staring at its

\textsuperscript{217} Nietzsche, \textit{The Birth of Tragedy}, 4-5.
own blacked-out reflection, illustrating that the irrational rationality and “bound” freedom it provides, is veiled by its promise of liberation. I would suggest that Action 6 particularly reflect Schopenhauer’s concerns regarding the possible lived conditions set up by the principium individuationis or the way we give order to our environment according to how it is perceived and that these elements exist to us as individual entities. This carries with it potential moral and ethical warnings:

If our usual perception of things in the world as individuated is erroneous, we are using a fiction as our guide in orienting our behaviour. This fiction, according to Schopenhauer, is not merely an inaccuracy. It is a vision that exerts a pernicious influence on our relationships to other people. Because we see other individuals as separate from ourselves, we imagine that we can benefit ourselves by exploiting and manipulating them. All evil that is perpetrated by one human being against another is premised on the view that the fates of individuals are separate and that one can hurt another without hurting oneself.218

According to Schopenhauer, it is only by penetrating through this veil of individuation, which blinds us to the “will” (Willens sum Lebens) that each thing-in-itself possesses, that an ethical form of enlightenment is possible.

In Dialectic of Enlightenment, Adorno and Horkheimer dedicate an entire chapter to the figure of Juliette, the protagonist of the Marquis de Sade’s novel of the same name, pos-

ing her as the embodiment of Enlightenment and the rationalized cruelty of which it is capable. They open the chapter with a quote by Kant on the Enlightenment’s equivalence to “the human being’s emergence from self-incurred minority,” minority being the “inability to make use of one’s own understanding without direction from another.” The implications of this statement, as pointed out by the authors, is that “understanding without direction” amounts to understanding guided by reason as opposed to belief systems determined or administered by institutions of power. Within the particular historical context of its emergence, the Enlightenment, in comparison to the Church’s abuse of power and the medieval worldview it countered, such an emancipatory suggestion would not carry with it the possible implications that it does today. When viewed within a historical totality, which has seen the rationalization of colonial occupation, ethnic cleansing and the subjugation of women, this rational ‘understanding without direction’ reveals itself to be as barbaric or backward as its alternative.

What Kant’s proposition amounts to, is that Enlightenment is not simply emancipation from external authority whether spiritual or political, but also the mind’s ability and freedom to order “its individual cognitions into a system in accordance with its own inner logic.” In other words, as a subjective process, there is no end to the rational ordering of one’s perceived environment and thus, to the endless rationalizing of reason itself. Thus, as history can attest to, reason’s purposeless purposiveness meant it could be “harnessed to any end.”

As discussed by Adorno and Horkheimer, Juliette refutes religion and morality, rejecting

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219 Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 63.

220 Ibid., 63.

221 Ibid., 69.
them as fictions and is determined to act according to the principles of pleasure and personal gain regardless of who is hurt in the process. Her calculated, implacable cruelty, and insatiable lust are free of remorse and perfectly rational as her perception is structured in accordance with her own inner logic. This of course becomes catastrophic when it is apprehended by the state (as it was in the case of National Socialism or any other form of totalitarian rule) which, as an external apparatus of control, dominates its population with “iron discipline” and “relieves its people from the burden of moral feeling”, thus freeing itself from any such constraints. Ultimately, these conditions, coupled with a capitalist system which thrives on economic exploitation has resulted in systematic and calculated violence perpetrated by a state “whose canon is its own brutal efficiency.” Juliette is the literary manifestation of such a regime whose modus operandi is rationalized and motivated by its own self-preservation.

These are the immediate realities with which a younger Austrian generation was forced to contend in the 1950s and ‘60s. The historical and geo-political specificity of post-World War II Austria explains much of why Actionism violently burst onto the scene. Austria, unlike Germany, was never fully held accountable for the part it played in supporting National Socialism. Written history and an international treatise tell us that Austria was Germany’s first victim and this had for a long time become part of the fabric of Austrian collective self-perception, a position strongly defended by the Austrian Second Republic estab-

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222 Ibid., 67.

223 Ibid., 68.
lished after the *Anschluss* and which persisted well into the 1980s. However, as per Hildemarie Uhl, support for National Socialism was greater in Austria than it had been in Germany as was antisemitism, proven by the fate of Viennese Jewry which was all but decimated. This historical amnesia adopted in self-preservation allowed for fascistic sentiment to quietly persist after the war, with many former members of the National Socialist Party gradually returning to domestic politics. Much of Actionism’s brutality can be attributed to these conditions in conjunction with generational guilt and the religious and political conservatism which permeated Austrian society. Additionally, it is worth mentioning the impact of new forms of media at the time. In the years following the war, the full extent of the state-sanctioned cruelty and violence of the concentration camps was gradually coming to light, not only through testimony but through images. This, juxtaposed with the decadence presented by the influx of American consumer culture into a fractured Europe, would undoubtedly lay the groundwork for radical artistic intervention deployed against the state’s blindness to its own hypocrisy.

The conditions set up by the Enlightenment — its celebration of the individual, the virtues of pure reason and scientific inquiry — while allowing for significant progress in terms of personal quality of life, the establishment of forms of democratic governance as well as the breakdown of superstition and the institutions of power which exploited it, did nothing

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224 As per the Moscow Declaration of 1943, Austria was declared the “First free country to fall victim to Hitlerite aggression.” This greatly impacted Austrian collective identity and functioned to exonerate the country from any complicity with Nazi Germany.


more than rebuild exploitative power dynamics upon the foundations of those it dismantled.

It is upon those foundations that capitalism was able to firmly establish itself as a dominant political economy based on individual interests and self-preservation and in doing so, as recursion has proven, made *hamartia*’s “Veil of Maya” all the more opaque.\(^{227}\)

**Reification: The Body and Abstractions**

*The reigning economic system is a vicious circle of isolation. Its technologies are based on isolation, and they contribute to that same isolation. From automobiles to television, the goods that the spectacular system chooses to produce also serve it as weapons for constantly reinforcing the conditions that engender “lonely crowds.”*


As previously discussed, while 1848 encompassed what Eric Hobsbawm argues are political manifestations of Enlightenment thought in France and the Germanic territories, it was also the initiation of what he calls The Age of Capital.\(^{228}\) In painting, within that same pivotal moment in the history of capitalism, the body is revealed as capitalism’s limit. Gustave Courbet’s *Stone Breakers* (1849) stands out in this respect. It is a depiction of the harsh impact of the emerging dominant economic system on France’s rural lower class. In 1849, Courbet paid homage to the plight of the poor, rural labourer with the depiction of a young boy and old man performing back-breaking work on the side of the road, at once glorifying

\(^{227}\) The “Veil of Maya” refers to illusion in Hindu and Buddhist philosophy and is referred to in both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche’s works.

\(^{228}\) In his text, *The Age of Capital*, Hobsbawm argues, corroborating Marx’s views, that the decisive moment of the 1848 revolutions was the confrontation in Paris in June when “the workers of Paris, manoeuvred into isolated insurrection, were defeated and massacred” which crystallized class division and the Bourgeoisie’s prioritizing accumulation of wealth rather than political equality. (30).
the labourer — capitalism’s greatest resource — with its monumental scale and emphasizing capital’s disregard for the optimal physical capability the body requires for work. Their faces are obscured, either by shadow or due to the orientation of their bodies in relation to the viewer; as subjects, they do not matter, only the work they perform. Courbet used crude, rough brushwork, going against the academic conventions of the period, at once allowing the medium to declare itself and formally conveying, in paint, the body’s existence under conditions of duress.229 This trend continued in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the avant-garde’s painterly experimentation and representation of “everyday life” which at once bore the tension between formal and real abstraction, while expressing a libidinal drive towards the concrete through the depiction of lived experience and the exposure of the medium’s materiality. In the 1960s, these parallel trajectories seemed to reach a critical tipping point evident in the uprisings against oppressive social norms and exploitative economic conditions in 1968, as well as the radical assertion of the body’s materiality in painting following Abstract Expressionism with works such as Brus’s previously discussed Selbstverstümmelung (1965). The action enacted this real and formal corporeal decay while violently asserting that corporeality, by having the body become at once paint, figure and support. In short, the body’s position in the history of Western thought seems to follow a parallel trajectory with its fate under capital and its depiction in painting.

In 1848 therefore, with the fusing of state interests with those of capitalist accumulation, time adopted the rhythm of production and accumulation, and history adopted the ebb

229 Bernstein expands upon this point in Against Voluptuous Bodies: “it is not too much of a stretch to see the abstraction from particularity and sensory givenness as the abstractive device of modern forms of social reproduction...Somehow the advance of the modern world, its enlightenment, is the advance of the process of abstraction and the domination of the qualitative by the quantitative.” (23).
and flow of a boom-and-bust cycle controlled by government economic policy. The past, therefore, is never actually passed but folded into the present, like the billow stoking the engine of recursion. The moralizing dogmas of Christianity are weaved into the cadence of accumulation with debt and poverty taking on the moral equivalent of guilt and sin, while instrumental reason functions to secularize and justify the pulse regulating the pursuit of profit at any cost. With the betrayal of the proletariat, and thus with capitalism’s symbolic victory, the state’s function was no longer the fostering of the common good, but rather the protection of capitalist interests. Furthermore, these conditions which saw the gradual dematerialization of the subject, were exacerbated with the reduction of the human being to a mere source of labour power from which value could be abstracted. Crucially, the bond between citizens unequivocally shifted from reciprocal need to money, from organic necessity to the general equivalent. As the longue durée marched on, with production and accumulation dictating the parameters of the working day, and with the securing of the material needs for subsis-

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231 See Eric Alliez, *Capital Times*. In footnote 5 of Chapter I, Alliez places Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics V.5* in dialogue with Marx’s response in 1844’s *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* which illustrates this shift from ‘need’ being the binding agent of the community, to money which is ironically also the agent of separation. While in the *Ethics* Alliez concludes that “need is the real benchmark, which, by assuring the organic cohesion of the community, guarantees the reciprocity of exchange; need is the just measure of exchange as social bond” and “need finding its “representative in currency, a fair price is the ‘cipher of social recognition’.” (E. Alliez. *Capital Times*, fn. 5 p. 246) Here clearly the sense of social responsibility and community cohesion is founded on the mutual meeting of natural needs via exchange. A reciprocity is implied for survival. Marx in 1844, says this of exchange under Capital: “If money is the bond binding me to human life, binding society with me, connecting me with nature and man, is not money the bond of all bonds?Can it not dissolve and bind all ties?Is it not therefor the universal unit of separation?It is the coin that really separates as well as the real binding agent.” (Marx as quoted by Alliez in *Capital Times*, fn 5, 246-247).

tence depending on the sale of the productive forces of the body, money and the ability to earn it without limit came to represent a form of social mobility and freedom from old oppressive forms of servitude, therefore occluding exploitative conditions. As figures such as Marx, Lukács, Debord and Marcuse have theorized, the most cunning aspect of these dehumanizing conditions, defined by the “transformation of a human function into a commodity,” is the concealed quality of the worker’s exploitation. As György Lukács states in History and Class Consciousness: “Just as the capitalist system continuously produces and reproduces itself economically on higher and higher levels, the structure of reification progressively sinks more deeply, more fatefuly and more definitively into the consciousness of man.” Life under capital creates a form of false consciousness, that is, an inability for subordinate classes to recognize their own objectification and exploitation, which vast improvements in living conditions and the fallacious security afforded by the wage only exacerbate.

Reification represents the final stage of the dematerialization of the subject already initiated by the subordination of the body to the soul under Christianity and the elevation of the rational faculties of the mind by the Enlightenment. The “thingification” of relationships between human beings, through the exchange of commodities and the resulting “reified, mechanically objectified performance of the worker, wholly separated from his human personality,” necessarily implies a violent process of dehumanization which would exacerbate an already existing collective malaise. I rely on György Lukács’s interpretation of reification to

233 Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, 92.
234 Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, 93.
235 Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, 90.
adequately convey its implications in terms of individual alienation and social separation especially in the wake of mechanization and its impact on labour time. He says:

Man’s own activity, his own labour becomes something objective and independent of him, something that controls him by virtue of an autonomy alien to man (…) The objectification of their labour-power into something opposed to their total personality is now made into the permanent ineluctable reality of their daily life. Here too the personality can do no more than look on helplessly while its own existence is reduced to an isolated particle and fed into an alien system. On the other hand, the mechanical disintegration of the process of production into its components also destroys those bonds that had bound individual to a community in the days when production was still organic.236

By the 1960s, the conditions of duress created by a capitalist mode of production and commodity fetishism reached what Herbert Marcuse called advanced industrial society’s totalitarian democratic unfreedom and this, within a mass consumer culture where media, entertainment and increased leisure time served to deepen false consciousness while producing an adulatory and mimetic repetition of the established order of things.237 As such a modern condition of individual alienation and social separation initiated in 1848 with the victory of

236 Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, 90.

bourgeois capitalism, which figures such as Wagner sought to remedy through a total artwork, were reaching a critical point, made visible in art practice with the fate of the body in painting. As previously mentioned at the onset of this section, as Western thought gradually diminished the significance of the body, capitalism went further by reifying it while the figure dissolved into paint and support. Mirroring the disappearance of the body’s productive capacity into the value form, the figure, in painting, dissolved as though unrepresentable or rather no longer worth representing, until it emerged as a trace of the artist’s gesture signalling, according to some, painting’s logical conclusion. While the body of the artist was present in performance art, and the body of the viewer was activated by sculptural works and happenings, in painting, in the wake of the debates between figuration and abstraction and in the midst of the body’s aforementioned erosion in discourse and within life under capital, it would have to return by asserting itself materially.

“I viewed my body and the act of painting once again as a kind of picture…the painter’s head was to become incorporated into the picture surface, become one with the picture and disappear into the picture.” Günter Brus’s experimentation with self-painting began after his first action, *ANA* in 1964, in which he transformed an entire room into a white canvas and began dripping black paint over objects, including his wife, in order to create a living painting. He had deemed it a failure as it produced at the very last moment and seemingly despite himself, what he viewed to be an abstract painting, indicating his regression into technique. The quote above, from the artist’s remarks on *Selbstbemalung* (1964), com-

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238 Clement Greenberg, for example, viewed Jackson Pollock’s gestural abstraction to epitomize the end point of the modernist painting’s self-reflexive trajectory.

municate a desire to have body and artist become painting itself: both figure and ground, both medium and image, and both worker and work. The self-painting produced by Brus’s labour resists the commodity form, and became further spatialized with *Vienna Spaziergang* in 1965 in which he walked as a living painting around the historical centre of Vienna, among its imperial monuments and up to St-Stephen’s Cathedral. While this act of self-painting signals a move beyond gestural abstraction, unequivocally rejecting the confines of medium specificity and, therefore, rebelling against a limiting modernist narrative, in doing so it reflects a two-fold drive towards totality. By this, I mean a move away from isolating the individual arts by bringing together painting, sculpture and performance on the one hand, and on the other, the demonstration of a libidinal drive towards the material assertion of that which, historically and aesthetically, had gradually been abstracted. While this implies a gesture of aesthetic revolt, it conversely mirrors the conditions experienced by the body within the *longue durée* I have proposed; the body, which was already condemned by religion and marginalized by reason, under capital was to disappear into the object its labour produced and thus dissolve into the whole of the economic ecosystem. Brus called the self-painting gesture “birth from obliteration,”240 further articulating the work’s double bind as an aesthetic revolt against a dire social reality which it is at once attempting to represent and unveil.

Brus's first self-painting action in December 1964 consisted of a hand painting, a head painting and a total head painting. Brus’s hand is first painted white and placed on a white surface, razor blades and nails are photographed between his fingers, then in another frame a bow saw and small scissors are placed next to his hand. Next, his head is painted entirely in

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240 Ibid., 29.
white save for a line of black paint vertically dividing his face. His eyes are closed preventing a confrontation with the viewer. A corkscrew and knife are placed on each side of his head, then an axe with its blade turned towards his temple. He is then seen painting over the black line, thickening it until the black paint covers his entire head. The juxtaposition between the body, white and fading into the background, and the various implements which signal a threat to the flesh, thus drawing the body into the consciousness of the viewer by making them aware of the body’s finite materiality, creates an interplay between the body’s vulnerability and that vulnerability being key to the recognition of a collective material truth; a collective rebirth through exposure to obliteration at a historical moment inching closer to an instance of rupture.

Although 1968, just as 1848, is more renowned for the events in Paris, the sentiment of repression was shared beyond the borders of France especially among the youth. The conditions in Austria were however particular, beyond the issue of a conservative political and cultural climate. Much of the youth and many young adults were still coming to terms with Austria’s role in the war along with the country’s continued assertion of its position as a victim of German aggression. Furthermore, the country, having technically become part of Germany in 1938 with the Anschluss, was struggling to construct a national identity in the aftermath of the war. The country’s adoption of the Opferdoktrine, championing the notion of Austrian victimhood, was a large part of Austria’s efforts to forge a postwar national identity while distancing itself from its complicity with National Socialism. This allowed Austria

to adopt a position of neutrality in the 1950s and was a strategic means of preventing its citizens from being ideologically divided according to its occupiers.\textsuperscript{242} Furthermore the influx of funds from an American postwar recovery plan meant an economic boom and a rise in consumer culture which exacerbated an atmosphere of conformity to certain social, cultural and political norms. This conformity and its connection to consumer culture, improved quality of life, increased in leisure time as well as the proliferation of images was one of the biggest points of critique against bourgeois society in the 1960s. While Guy Debord and the \textit{Situationist International} railed against the Spectacle, influencing the student movement in Paris in 1968 both ideologically and formally, in Vienna the Actionists deployed their bodies as resistance against conformity to societal norms which rendered the body a passive entity and object of exploitation, subject to both real and figurative state violence.\textsuperscript{243} This paradoxical condition of citizenship and vulnerability to the modern state is conveyed in the action \textit{Vietnam Party} (1966) in which Brus and Muehl invited guests to dress up with bandages and use jam, ketchup, cream cheese as well as other foodstuffs to imitate wounds and facilitate a collective “artistic depiction of torture and cruelty.”\textsuperscript{244} Participants were also asked to wear army uniforms, the whole of the action thus outwardly reflecting the downside of modern citizenship, together with the moral decay implied by the state’s ability to sacrifice its cit-  

\textsuperscript{242} Austria was divided territorially with the Soviets occupying the Burgenland and Niederösterreich (West), Oberösterreich and Salzburg was occupied by the American forces (Centre North), the British occupied Karnten and Steirmark (Centre South), and the French occupied Tirol and Vorarlberg (East).

\textsuperscript{243} Here I refer to the gesture of \textit{détournement} which Tom McDonough discusses in his text \textit{The Beautiful Language of My Century: Reinventing the Language of Contestation in Postwar France 1945-1968}.

\textsuperscript{244} Brus and Muehl. “Text of Invitation for \textit{Vietnam Party},” in Green, \textit{Writings of the Vienna Actionists}, 42.
zens in the name of nationalism and/or ideological imperialism, something Austria was all
too familiar with. Furthermore, I understand the participatory aspect of this action to be
crucial to consider in terms of its function, under the guise of rebellious exposure of the
state’s monopoly on violence, as a communal exposure to a collective wounding contributing
to social separation. An abstract rupture which this text has argued to be corporeal and histor-
ically contingent, two points which *Vietnam Party* formally and concretely conveyed through
the mimicking of wounds inflicted by the state or in its name.

The totalizing drive behind the Actionists’ work, as seen in Muehl and Brus so-called
total actions and Nitsch and Schwarzkogler’s ritual actions, conveyed by the combination of
various mediums, the inclusion of every day materials and the reference to cultural ritual,
was another tactic of resistance against aesthetic and social conformity by escaping the task
of representation. As stated in the text for the *Second Total Action* (1966) involving Muehl
and Brus: “old art forms attempt to reconstruct reality, total action occurs within reality itself.
A total action is a direct occurrence (direct art), not the repetition of an occurrence, but a di-
rect encounter between unconscious elements and reality (material).” This move towards
totality was of course shared by Wagner in the wake of 1848’s failures, to which I have ar-
gued, the unrest of the 1960s was a delayed reaction. As Muehl and Brus state in the text of
invitation to their first *Total Action (Ornament and Crime)*, a sentiment with which I believe

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245 This also points to the equally problematic flip side of the Enlightenment coin, that is the Roman-
tic idealization of the myth of the State, a pout which will be further discussed in Chapter II.

246 *Total Actions* were a combination of Brus's Direct Art and Muehl's Material Actions.

247 Brus and Muehl, “Text of Invitation for Second Total Action,” in Green, *Writings of the Vienna
Actionists*, 41.
Wagner would have been in agreement, “total action…combines the elements of all art forms, painting, music, literature, film, theatre which have been so infected by the progressive process of cretinization in our society that any examination of reality has become impossible using these means alone.” These two excerpts along with the radical nature of the bodily actions, imply a call for a collective rousing from a condition of passive contemplation. A condition which in the 1960s, and as Guy Debord lamented in *Society of the Spectacle*, was engendered by a state of affairs defined by a capitalist mode of production and mass visual culture, which united society within a contemplative state of total alienation. Thus, a direct confrontation with reality experienced through the senses and aesthetically facilitated by the juxtaposition of incongruous elements — jam as paint, bodies as canvases — as opposed to a mere representation of reality, would awaken a passive population to the veiled conditions of oppressive “unfreedom” and free it of the bourgeois conception of time, which has contributed to its inability to understand its position within a historical whole. This, along with the focus on the body and sensuous experience, I argue, signals that the Actionists inherited a distinctly Viennese aesthetic and intellectual/psychoanalytical heritage comprised of a Secessionist and Expressionist counter-cultural ethos, as well as a deep interest in the exploration of the psyche, all of which will be further unpacked in Chapter II. This transgressive formal language and mobilization of the fleshy body to disrupt established social norms, to confront an inaccessible reality, and to mine the inner depths of the individual psy-


249 For more on conditions of oppressive “unfreedom” in advanced technological society see Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (1964).
che, express an overall calling for emancipation and for a collective raising of consciousness at a time when capitalism had driven alienation and discontent to a point of crisis.

Herbert Marcuse draws some poignant connections between liberation and the body in his 1969 text *An Essay on Liberation*. The opening of his text characterizes the global dominion of corporate capital by the 1960s as being of an economic and military nature. The text was written ahead of the 1968 uprisings and examined the possibilities for the emergence of a socialist society qualitatively different from the existing one.\(^{250}\) Marcuse proposes that a capitalist, class-based society has quelled the very instinctual basis of freedom. He says:

What is now at stake are the needs themselves. At this stage, the question is no longer: how can the individual satisfy his own needs without hurting others, but rather: how can he satisfy his own need without hurting himself, without reproducing, through his aspirations and satisfactions, his dependance on an exploitative apparatus which in satisfying his needs perpetuates his own servitude?\(^{251}\)

What Marcuse is suggesting is that the driving force behind revolutionary change would not solely result from the attainment of collective class consciousness, as proposed by Lukács in his discussion of the proletarian’s unique position as subject and object of a capitalist mode of production which gave it the ability to view history and the contemporary condition in its totality.\(^{252}\) Nor would it stem from lifting the veil of the spectacle, capitalism’s vis-


\(^{251}\) Ibid., 5.

ual language, which Debord blamed for reducing the worker to a contemplative state to which he fully subjects himself and which blinds him to his own objectification.\textsuperscript{253} For Mar

cuse, as I understand for the Actionists, liberation would have to take root in Nature. The Enlightenment, which paved the way for a capitalist political economy to take hold, was grounded partly in making nature an object of scientific and technological inquiry. Thus, technical (\textit{technological}) rationality or the scientific instrumentalization of nature, is a cornerstone of the process of domination. Not only because of its destructive potential, but because according to Marcuse, technology has impacted biological and social processes by creating false needs and having humans adapt to, and comply with a hegemonic technological apparatus of political and economic control. The individual simply dissolves into the whole.\textsuperscript{254} The body, and its libidinal drives, are necessarily impacted by this process as “the natural universe is an object of beauty and mystery, a mirror in which people see their own reflection. By damaging nature, technical rationality damages the human spirit and desire.”\textsuperscript{255}

Therefore, to Marcuse, revolution would occur on a biological level whereby man’s very sensibility would have to shift; false needs would be identified as such, an instinctual barrier against cruelty would develop, and society would free itself from shame.\textsuperscript{256} This new sensibility, as a negation of the dominant order and its morality, as the “affirmation of the right to

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{253} See G. Debord, \textit{The Society of the Spectacle} (1967).
  \item \textsuperscript{255} Ben Agger, \textit{The Discourse of Domination: From the Frankfurt School to Postmodernism} (Evanston, IL: NU Press, 1992), 201.
  \item \textsuperscript{256} Marcuse, \textit{Essay on Liberation}, 21.
\end{itemize}
build a society in which the abolition of poverty and toil terminate in a universe where the sensuous, the playful, the calm, and the beautiful become forms of existence and thereby the form of society amounts to a collective understanding of the value of life and the creation of what Marcuse calls a productive-creative process. Labour, under these conditions would take on a generative, even creative quality as opposed to being reduced to simple toil within a system solely focused on the accumulation of wealth.

In using everyday substances such as foodstuffs and bodily material such as blood and urine in their actions, I argue the Actionists attempted to bridge the gap between everyday reality, its most base bodily processes suppressed by culture and propriety, and the aesthetic sphere whose parameters had been dictated by a stifling art historical narrative. They do this in a manner which brings the aesthetic into the everyday or the everyday, the body more specifically, into the aesthetic process. Just as Marcuse, and Wagner before him, they are calling for an end to the segregation of aesthetic values from everyday reality and lived experience. There is, therefore, an aesthetic dimension as well as a bodily dimension to this proposed and rather utopian and romantic revolutionary praxis, which is in keeping with a German Romantic discursive history pertaining to the desire for the creation of an aesthetic state. On the other hand, the bodily, often ritualistic quality of the actions, with their Dionysian and at times orgiastic character, speaks to a Marcusean drive toward a new aesthetic sensibility, a Freudian excavation of the psyche through the embrace of social and cul-

257 Ibid., 25.

258 The “aesthetic state” will be discussed in Chapter II. See Josef Chytry The Aesthetic State: A Quest in Modern German Thought (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989).
tural taboos, and a Wagnerian totalization demanding a more embodied mode of aesthetic reception bearing consciousness-raising potential.²⁵⁹

While considering the conditions outlined in this chapter, as well as social separation’s rootedness in a collective body problem or a dematerialization of subjectivity, caused by a violent and exploitative historical denouement, the following chapter will explore an alternative Romantic discourse and its embrace of nature and myth. This Romantic discursive trajectory must also be viewed critically. Despite its resistance toward Enlightenment’s championing of pure reason, and its own understanding of the means by which to arrive at social and political cohesion where human relationships are not mediated by the market, it also held its own limitations and violent potentialities. Mainly, as I will argue, due to an equally privileged and exclusionary perspective, and to its blindness to that very condition.

²⁵⁹ I refer here to the concept of Einfühlung which is a compassionate mode of aesthetic reception associated with Wagner’s Gesamtkunstwerk.
Chapter II: Romantic “Myth” and The Gesamkunstwerk

Just as myth’s founding purpose lies in articulating the relation between nature and history, the divine and the human, so romanticism seeks to denaturalize man by re-embedding him in a natural historical world prior to the modern illusion of a self-grounding subjectivity.

-David Roberts and Peter Murphy, Dialectic of Romanticism, 2004.

While conducting research for this project at the Museum der Moderne Kunst in Vienna, I had the pleasure of meeting with head curator, Dr. Eva Badura-Triska. This entretien occurred a few days following the opening of an exhibition called Korpe, Psyche, Tabu: Wiener Aktionismus & die Frühe Wiener Moderne. The exhibition, a celebration of Actionism as Austria’s greatest contribution to the art of the postwar period, placed the work of its core protagonists in dialogue with those of fin-de-siècle masters such as Klimt, Kokoshka, and Shiele. Considering her extensive knowledge of the Actionists’ works, I asked Badura-Triska if, for her, there were any questions that remained unanswered. Her reply pertained to Actionism’s geo-political and cultural specificity, and came in the form of more questions; “Why did Actionism happen in Vienna? Why did this very radical form of body art, of abject rejection, occur here? Why not Paris? Or elsewhere?” 260 This anecdote, which occurred at the very outset of this project not only serves as a framing device for this chapter but also provoked a need to expand my investigation beyond the phenomena’s immediate geopolitical, historical and art historical parameters in order to excavate its political gravitas and its resonance into the present. Badura-Triska followed these questions by specifying that within the context of the 1960s, and regardless of the devastation caused by National Socialism,

260 Eva Badura-Triska, Interview with the author at MuMOK, Vienna. March 2016.
which had particular significance in Austria and Germany, both capitalism and Christianity had caused oppressive conditions all over Europe; so why did Actionism happen in Vienna of all places? In other words, the hamartia excavated in the previous chapter, as well as the cultural and economical phenomena that caused this collective and historical wounding were not exclusive to the Austrian or Viennese context. Therefore, why had this radical aesthetic focus on embodiment and materiality, on affect and the abject, occur in Vienna? The aforementioned exhibition held, in my opinion, many clues to this query in terms of a specifically Viennese aesthetic ancestry informed by utopian romanticism. As this chapter will convey, the key to Actionism’s emergence in Vienna lies in their inheritance of an aesthetic discourse which privileged totalization in the midst of a modernist narrative that mirrored corporeal erosion through its insistence on abstraction. Furthermore, that discourse’s grounding in redemptive Romantic myth as a counter to an alienating modern condition, along with Vienna’s oppressive Catholicism and interest in the impact of repressed instinctual drives, offer additional insight into Actionism’s geopolitical specificity.

The aesthetics of myth and ritual figure prominently in Hermann Nitsch’s redemptive Orgien Mysterien Theatre project, conceived as a total artwork. It therefore more immediately registers as establishing a dialogue with a Central European aesthetic and discursive ancestry as well as Western culture and politics’ rootedness in the imagining of collective existence. The emancipatory potential of the experience of the work and that emancipation’s translation to a “regenerated humanity”261 are consistent with Wagner’s notion of the redemptive artwork and the self-sacrifice of the individual to the whole through aesthetic reception,

261 Nitsch, “O.M.T Manifesto” in Green, Writings of the Vienna Actionists, 133.
giving rise to an entirely new order of being. Nitsch’s vision however, of the “celebration of extreme situations that are to be registered to the most sensually intense degree”\(^ {262} \) which would liberate the audience of inhibitions, do not have a direct political outcome in mind, but rather strive for an individual and collective liberation from historically contingent social constraints through the communal engagement in sensual experiences and the release of repressed inner urges. Nitsch, I argue, sought to facilitate a collective deliverance from history’s oppressive constraints by borrowing from its visual and performative languages and by way of its most mediated and represented object, the body, while moving it from the space of representation to one of presentation. That is, through the embodied reception of overwhelming sensorial stimulation and by exploring the body’s materiality through exposure to what Nitsch calls “abandoned intoxication” or “excess experience.”\(^ {263} \) These encounters with liminality or the experience of sensorial thresholds, such as sexual ecstasy and the experience of the cross as a form of orgiastic redemption, which Nitsch’s work aimed to facilitate, mediated by history and culture, were necessarily transgressive in nature especially considering Austria’s conservative catholic context.\(^ {264} \) This sheds light on the leitmotifs Nitsch employs and which he borrows from models of communitarian existence *par excellence*; Dionysian ritual and Christian rite, both Western constructs and articulations of community either political or sacred which have shaped history, discourse and consciousness, and as such have contributed

\(^ {262} \) Ibid. 133.

\(^ {263} \) Nitsch mentions the orgy and the experience of the cross for example as facilitating the excess experience.

\(^ {264} \) The formal language Nitsch employs is the only one which is “available” to him. It is derived from culture and history and that which has bound the body and imposed meaning upon it. Here I view the same Bataillean impasse of constructive-destruction discussed later in this chapter in relation to Muehl’s work being manifest here.
to the oppressive conditions from which repression stems. Nitsch’s painting actions or abreaction plays, as appropriations and inversions of highly determined visual and ritual vernacular, hinge on and intend to provoke the experience of extreme states — the orgiastic, the sacrificial, pain and pleasure — in a public and collective manner, thus facilitating the abreactive release of blocked unconscious drives with whatever visual material the action produces, functioning as a register of that release.

Nitsch’s specific reference to abreaction is undergirded by his Viennese context, the birthplace of Freudian psychoanalysis. Abreaction refers to a therapeutic method whereby one may experience a discharge of repressed emotions through the recalling of painful events or traumatic experience. According to Freud, the unconscious harbouring and accumulation of emotions stemming from trauma held pathogenic potential, intimating the connection between psychical suffering and the potential decay of the material body. Considering this, Nitsch's attempt to facilitate an emotional purge coupled with his deployment of a Christian visual vernacular — crucifixion, the lamb and the side-wound — speaks to the traumatic nature of the Christian institutional disciplining unpacked in the previous chapter and deeply imbedded into a Western collective unconscious over generations. The ritualistic nature of the work conversely recalls the traumatic void left behind in the aftermath of mass secularization following over a millennia of Christian belonging solidified through ritualistic participation. In this manner, Nitsch’s work, appears as a means to abreact repressed emotions resulting from centuries of trauma and from that caused by religion’s withdrawal, using the symbols of


266 Ibid.
communitarian religion as a trigger. This paradoxical trauma of discipline and withdrawal mirrors the evolution of Freud’s thoughts on religion whereby in *Future of an Illusion* (1927) he understands it as a consequence of man’s trauma and fear in the face of uncontrollable nature—namely death—which man can move beyond as one would a youthful obsession. Conversely, in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), Freud recognizes religion’s value as far as the experience of belonging and connectedness it provides, albeit relating it to a form of mass-delusion. Though shared, it is never recognized as such. However, Freud contends that by drawing believers in, religion spares “many people an individual neurosis,” hinting at its social value. Considering this, and within the specificity of the Viennese context, therefore, as reflected in the temple-like architecture of the Vienna Secession House and as seen in works by Gustav Klimt and the ritualistic actions of Hermann Nitsch, there appears to have been a persistence of myth, or at the very least, an interest in its role in man’s psychical life or its capacity to counter an alienating modern condition.

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267 See Sigmund Freud (1927), *Future of an Illusion*, translated by James Strachey (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1975) 5-56. “And thus a store of ideas is created, born from man’s need to make his helplessness tolerable and built up from material of memories of the helplessness of his own childhood and the childhood of the human race. It can clearly be seen that the possession of these ideas protects him in two direction—against the dangers of nature and Fate, and against the injuries that threaten him from human society. Here is the gist of the matter. Life in this world serves a higher purpose; no doubt it is not easy to guess what that purpose is, but it certainly signifies a perfecting of man’s nature. It is probably the spiritual part of man, the soul, which in the course of time has so slowly and unwillingly detached itself from the body, that is the object of this elevation and exaltation… Over each one of us there watches a benevolent Providence which is only seemingly stern and which will not suffer us to become a plaything of the over-mighty and pitiless forces of nature.” (18-19)

268 Sigmund Freud (1930), *Civilization and its Discontents*, translated by James Strachey (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963) 11-94, 28 and 32. Freud more specifically relates religion to a form of refashioning of reality by many people in common, and this to protect against suffering and as a guarantor of happiness. (28) The emphasis on the “common” or the “mass” in this text on the one hand and Christianity’s corporeal groundings on the other—in term of both discipline and salvation—further support my argument regarding a historically contingent collective malaise rooted in the body, and its exacerbation and reproduction under capital.
This chapter will excavate Vienna’s specific aesthetic and intellectual response to the conditions outlined in Chapter I. It seeks to unpack the redemptive myths of Romanticism and their political and aesthetic ramifications. Furthermore, it will consider the intellectual interest in the relationship between body and psyche within the longue durée at hand, which laid the discursive and aesthetic foundations upon which Actionism’s radical and embodied revolt was to develop. Furthermore, the following examines the inclination toward aesthetic totalization that seems to have driven Vienna’s aesthetic output in the midst of the dominant modernist narrative’s privileging of abstraction. It resists a position that posits the development of modernity as driven solely by the pursuit of pure reason, and will counter that historical narrative with the suggestion that the Romantic critique of reason was an equally vocal note in the emergence and elaboration of aesthetic modernity. As proposed by Peter Murphy and David Roberts in Dialectic of Romanticism: A Critique of Modernity, “both romanticism and enlightenment have proved fatal genies in modernity.”269 Hence the myths they each constituted, Romanticism’s myth of an aesthetic state of archaic origin as well as Enlightenment’s myth of absolute emancipation through reason and scientific control of nature, had a hand in forging the conditions against which the Actionists were resisting in the postwar 1960s. Furthermore, I argue in this chapter, that the root of each of these fatal genies’ failure can be located in their always already androcentric and exclusionary origins, which account for the latent and manifest violence their subsequent discursive and political development took on well into the 1960s. A masculinist condition which much of the Actionists’ work,

viewed retrospectively, makes formally manifest. This point will be further clarified in Chapter III, when the dominance of patriarchal world views inherent in enlightenment and romantic thought in conjunction with their mediation of lived experience and exclusion of the non-normative body will be addressed and challenged in the work of VALIE EXPORT.

From 1963 to 1965, Muehl performed a number of material actions and privately published a series of scripts which entailed, in particular, the covering of female participants with various substances and foodstuffs. While these material actions display a certain innocent irreverence in their expenditure (covering a woman’s backside in bread crumbs for example, or smearing pork drippings over an old woman), they have in common the reduction of female participants to mere surface and cavity. For example at the conclusion of Material Action 3: Breadcrumbing a Woman’s Backside, performed in February 1964, Muehl after having a woman with an “above average backside kneel on a chair and bend forward so that her backside towers up like a monument in the room” and covering her buttocks with egg and breadcrumbs, bites her backside and “parts her glued up pubic hair wearing rubber gloves and reveal(s) her vagina and anal opening.”

I do not wish to strip the female participants in the Actionists’ work of any agency, since that would simply re-inscribe a misogynist viewpoint. Nor do I intend to redeem Muehl of his problematic interactions with women, because I believe it is crucial to refrain from projecting a twenty-first century lens onto the social, cultural and discursive moment in which these actions were performed. Knowing that we are operating within a history shaped by discourse that is masculinist, European and heteronormative.

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270 Muehl, “Material Action 3: Breadcrumbing a Woman’s Backside,” in Green, Writings of the Vienna Actionists, 83.
mative, and that the work is simply a reflection of that reality, it is more productive to direct our attention to what the work was doing in relation to the historically rooted collective body problem from which systemic racism and sexism spring.

The misogyny is evident in terms of the use of female participants and the occasionally violent and sexual nature of the works and writing.\textsuperscript{271} I believe that a critical unpacking of the work must consider this misogynist undertone as part of a historical and art historical rule, rather than an exception. Even as Muehl resists the established order of things, there is a disregard for the subordination of women which is part and parcel of that established order. The issue of misogyny or the normalized subordination of women escapes his ‘revolutionary’ consciousness. In other words, the work is consistent with the maintenance of structures belonging to the target of revolutionary action, and in this case, it is the historically contingent unequal power relation between men and women. Here, he sustains this by carrying the trope of the artist and female model to its limits and by fundamentally disregarding the re-inscription of oppressive and hegemonic misogyny. In this way, viewed retrospectively and within the context of this study, the work makes \textit{hamartia} manifest. That is, in its myopic attempt to rid itself of old tyrannies, it is unable to view the totality of the historical and contemporary conditions of oppression, thus allowing historical wounds to continue to infect the present. However, instead of ignoring the dynamic the work re-inscribes, or critically dismissing the work on those grounds, I suggest that it be considered as an important part of the work in terms of deepening the dialogue of the historical contingency of such power relations, their

\textsuperscript{271} I am not exclusively speaking of Muehl’s work here as Hermann Nitsch also used and sexualized female actors while Brus often used his wife in his actions.
perpetuation and the aesthetic modes of resistance which have been deployed to counter them.

The names of two early material actions, *Degradation of a Venus* (1963) and *Chatanooga: The Destruction of a Woman’s Body Using Foodstuffs* (1964), clearly connote a destructive impulse towards woman. I would argue that the works also suggest a desire to defile the art historical archetype of womanhood: the Venus and the reclining nude. That is, the naked female body upon which the modernist project violently set its sights, and this as an extension of attacking painting itself, as a product of a repressive culture against which the work stands as an act of total refusal.\(^{272}\) The instrumentalization of female bodies is undoubtedly present in these material actions. While problematic, considering the role of the female nude in the art historical trajectory towards abstraction, I understand the work to point to a greater aesthetic gesture rather than simply mirroring an endemic social problem. I propose that the recrudescence of this particular body, the *Venus* or female nude, in the aftermath of abstraction, is for the purpose of destroying the sacrality of the traditional medium by desecrating its materials, as well as one of its most prized subjects. Just as the body is capitalism’s limit, the female nude, I would argue, is modernism’s. The unrestrained use of the female body in service of the action, again simply as surface and even cavity as a means to revolt against established norms, whether aesthetic or cultural, places the work within a particular double bind. The work illustrates the recursive and libidinal economy of *hamartia* by resisting through transgression while at the same time internalizing and, therefore, imitating the

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\(^{272}\) From *Olympia’s* flatness to Cézanne’s defaced *Bathers*, Picasso’s *Demoiselles*, de Kooning’s *Woman I*. Even the violence implied by *ManRay’s Gift* and *Yves Klein’s live “paintbrushes”* point to a formal and psychical violence towards women which is part and parcel of the modernist project that Muehl appears to carry to its (ir)rational conclusion.
exploitative order it is at the very same time attempting to oppose. It does so while reflecting
the dialectical pull between Enlightenment’s rational subordination of nature/body and Ro-
manticism’s desire to eradicate the antagonism between man and nature qua body. It points to
an impasse faced after, and even preceding, World War II; the issue of horror and human na-
ture’s delighted fascination with it, a topic extensively investigated by Georges Bataille, fic-
tionalized by Sade and, I argue, examined by Muehl in the 1960s following the joint failures
of Enlightenment’s rational irrationality and Romanticism’s myth of the nation. Bataille
asks: “How on the one hand do we sever the impulse of revolt from the contrary inclination
to bend others to our will?” Thus the challenge which I see represented in Muehl’s aes-
thetic and procedural violence encompasses the paradox presented by freedom as put forth by
Bataille. That is, regulating expenditure, or resisting accumulation of excess (whether natural
or derived from political economies) while “balancing individual passion and social respon-
sibility.” While I do not view Muehl as successful in achieving the balance Bataille pro-
poses, I do view the work as illustrating that particular problem set of expenditure.

Following the quasi eroticism of Nazism’s brand of state terror and in the midst of a
postwar economic boom focused on accumulation and the control of expenditure through the
regulation of labour and within a system which touts the moral superiority of the amassing of

273 For more on Bataille’s interest in the issue of horror and human nature’s delighted fascination with
it this see Stuart Kendall’s “The Horror of Liberty” in The Obsession of Georges Bataille: Community
and Communication, edited by Andrew J. Mitchell and Jason Kemp Winfree (Albay, NY: SUNY

274 Bataille’s Oeuvre Complete as quoted by Kendall in the “Horror of Liberty”, 48.

wealth, I view Muehl’s work to show symptoms of a flight into baseness. This vision of emancipation through reconciliation with suppressed instinctual drives, this flight into nature, into the body, is a refusal of the dominant order which nevertheless runs the danger of imitating or reinstating that which it actually contests. Instead of simple aestheticization of violence, Muehl offers us an aestheticization of *hamartia*, the tragic error in action.

**Eroticism, Expenditure and Emancipation**

> *leonardo places leda, naked, on a table.*
> *he rubs salad oil into her skin (…)*
> *He tips jam over her (…)*
> *he attaches cooked noodles and donuts to her body with sticky tape and pours whipped cream over them.*
> *leonardo laps up the whipped cream and bites the noodles*
> *leonardo places a large inflated plastic swan between her legs (…)*
> *leonardo inflates the swan (…)*
> *leonardo places the swan’s beak in her mouth and sucks at it.*


In the myth of *Leda and the Swan*, Leda, the queen of Sparta, is raped by Zeus in the guise of a swan. The union, which coincided with Leda consummating her relationship with her husband on the same night, resulted in the births of Helen who would become Helen of Troy, Clytemnestra and the Dioscuri, known as the helpers of mankind in times of crisis. In other versions, the swan rapes Nemesis, the goddess of retribution against those who prosper from evil deeds or undeserved good fortune and who was viewed as the force of balance in the world. The subject is of particular art historical significance as it has been depicted re-

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276 The ban of the potlatch on the North West Coast is an example of capitalism’s moralizing of accumulation and its vilifying of expenditure. Capitalism, in this case exposed itself as inherently Christian.
peatedly in both painting and sculpture since Antiquity. During the Early Modern period, mythological rape was an acceptable means of depicting female nudity and erotic content in genre paintings or as a metaphor for political and military conquest. The myth of Leda was also a popular subject in modern art. Gustav Klimt featured it in *Leda* from 1917, where Leda is depicted sleeping on her stomach while a black swan approaches her from behind. Curiously, a particularly erotic version of the myth painted by German artist Paul Matthias Padua in 1939 and which had attracted outrage for its overt sexual rendering of the subject, was a favourite of Hitler's who purchased it for his home. In short, the myth and its popularity speak to the perceived eroticism of sexual violence on the one hand and its correlation to political conquest on the other; the co-mingling of delight and terror packaged for a male audience and made palatable by its mythical narrative.

Muehl’s staging of the myth in 1964 (fig. 5), which was performed only to be filmed and photographed in collaboration with experimental filmmaker Kurt Kren, takes the tale beyond the canvas and into action, in a manner which violates the subject’s art historical sacrality while profaning painting through the use of everyday substances. Beyond this, the myth is stripped of its eroticism or rather its eroticism is normalized through the manipulation of the female participant, in a manner which mimics various sexual scenarios with a blow-up swan, and who is gradually covered in everything from paper clips to feathers and salad dressing (fig. 6). What interests me here, is the ambiguous role of eroticism in this work and in other of Muehl’s actions such as *Material Aktion 17: O Tannebaum* (fig. 7) from 1964 also filmed by Kurt Kren. In the action a male and female, participant engage in an elaborate action involving a Christmas tree, various foodstuffs, the simulation of coitus and the manipulation of
their genitals in a manner which alludes to the taboo eroticism of sexual torture. There seems to be, in both *Leda mit dem Schwan* and *O Tannebaum*, an impulse to dismantle eroticism, evacuate it of its culturally contingent immorality by bringing the erotic into the everyday through its juxtaposition with non-erotic scenarios and substances (paper clips, salad dressing, a blow up swan, a christmas tree). Conversely, *Leda mit dem Schwan* displays greater perversion than a simple representation of the myth due to its migration from representation in traditional media to action. Action, in this case, implies making manifest the inherent violence of the Leda myth which had been kept veiled by its confinement to the canvas and its segregation to two dimensional space.

In his texts, Muehl is careful to specify that within these material actions, “a human body does not appear as a human, as a person, as a sexual being… in material actions, the body is cracked open like an egg and exposes the yolk.” The body is simply a body with material properties and not a person. Through the texts and the works, I understand a tension between a Sadean instrumentalization of bodies in relation to an embrace of a bodily

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277 It is said that it took a very long time for Kren to find a studio willing to develop the film due to the nature of its content. See *Vienna Actionism: Art and Upheaval in 1960s Vienna*, ed. Eva Badura-Triska and Hubert Klocker Published by MUMOK (2012). In the action’s score, some of the film frames describing the manipulation of bodies and genitalia are written as follows: “hand kneads breast…penis through aluminium foil fir twig tied on to it…penis through pitchfork…breast through pitchfork…B (male) spreads legs A (female) kneels between them penis to one side in mouth…” Muehl, “Material Action 17: O Christmas Tree,” in Green, *Writings of the Vienna Actionists*, 90.

278 The same violence of myth can be alluded to in *O Tannebaum* which references the birth of the Christian myth (foreshadowing the redemptive violence of Christ’s death) along with its manifestation in the object of the Christmas Tree, which saw its beginnings as part of a Germanic pagan celebration of the Saturnalia and then was absorbed into the Christian religion.

279 Muehl as quoted in *Vienna Actionism: Art and Upheaval in 1960s Vienna*. Published by MUMOK ed. Eva Badura Triska and Hubert Klocker, 375.

materiality from which subjects are alienated as a result of previously discussed cultural and
economic processes. It displays a tension between Enlightenment’s capacity for irrational
rationality and Romanticism’s desire for a re-naturalization, and this through the seemingly
‘violent’ or ‘violating’ manipulation of the other’s body on the one hand, and through the
staging of the erotic in a manner which re-naturalizes it on the other. Muehl does this by
evacuating it of culturally and historically determined moral stigma or preciousness through
the incorporation of incongruous elements belonging to the realm of everyday life.

Returning to Muehl’s orchestration of the actions, the eroticism and the detached use
of bodies, there is an exposure of instrumental reason’s capacity for brutality while converse-
ly also a rejection of servility to the forces of abstraction and accumulation, through the un-
inhibited embrace of materiality and unproductive expenditure. This refusal of servility
amounts to a refusal of civility, a means of negating the propriety and norms of history’s civi-
lizing projects and of the established order necessarily responsible for social separation. Re-
sisting civility and, therefore, servility thus encourages an entirely new way of being and of
being-with. In “Item 3” of Georges Bataille’s Programme (1936), the text which outlines his
call for community, he states: “Assume the function of destruction and decomposition, but as
accomplishment and not as the negation of being.” This excerpt outlines the constructive
potential of a destructive impulse and Bataille wrote this at a time when “the homogenizing

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281 In 1963, before his action Degradation of a Venus, Muehl had be introduced to Oswald Wiener who recommended that he read material by the Marquis the Sade. So it is reasonable to conclude that these subsequent actions demonstrate some influence.


283 Georges Bataille, “Programme (relative to Acephale)” in The Bataille Reader, 121.
forces of society were reaching a state of political and social crisis, but for which there was not political solution.”

While this was in the 1930s within the context of the rise of National Socialism, I view the same moment of historical crisis manifest in the 1960s, however in this case, the impossibility of a political solution was exacerbated by a post-fascism Cold War climate and unprecedented consumer capitalism. In Muehl’s above mentioned actions, there is a resistance to the ethos of capital, of production for the sake of accumulation, while at the same time an exposure of the paradox outlined by Bataille concerning the full embrace of revolutionary impulse and the inherent risk of mimicking authoritarianism, a circumstance exemplified by the recursion which underpins this inquiry. I propose that instead of understanding the work as proto-fascist or as a pure imitation of Sadean domination, that it makes manifest the precarious condition of being human akin to Bataille’s understanding of Nietzschean humanism:

The human world is finally but a hybrid of transgression and prohibition, so that the word human always denotes a system of contradictory impulses…

Hence the word human never denotes, as the naive imagine, a stabilized position, but rather an apparently precarious equilibrium that distinguishes the human quality.

I therefore view the dismissal of Muehl’s work as fascistic somewhat reductive and facile as it does not reflect the work’s position in relation to the complexities of its location within a particular historical moment and within a broader historical and discursive totality.

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284 Mitchel and Winfree, eds. The Obsession of Georges Bataille 3.

Muehl’s unbridled action of revolt against History and against Painting at this particular historical moment and at this political juncture; after fascism and in the midst of the crisis of state-run communism,\(^{286}\) displays an ebullition of passion “as naturally rebellious” without power and domination necessarily being the ultimate end goal but rather as “limitless expenditure rapidly destroying power.”\(^{287}\) However, and returning to my earlier discussion on the regulation of expenditure, the work cannot help but expose the delicate balance between affirmation of sovereignty and subordination of the “other.” In the attempt to give rise to a new vision of humanity, something to which recursive history can attest, while subjectivization may not be the end goal, to give rise to a new vision of a free humanity and in that moment of constructive destruction, a process of violent subordination seems nevertheless to occur, and this, I argue, because of the impossibility of abolishing History, its mediation of the body or its continuous haunting of given contemporary conditions. Muehl’s work in this manner, ‘performs’ the impossibility of Bataille’s project of depoliticization, where theory collapses in the face of nature’s carnal, illogical, untamed and wounded materiality, and its compulsion to repeat.\(^{288}\)

\(^{286}\) In *Obsession of Georges Bataille*, Mitchell and Winfree discuss both fascism and state-led communism as systems which “subordinate the lives of the worker to the needs of production and both subordinate production …to the responsible accumulation of wealth.” (54).


\(^{288}\) In the introduction to the *Bataille Reader*, Botting and Wilson state: “Through proposing the ‘decomposition’ of all communities, the forms of community that arise within bourgeois economic and social systems, Bataille establishes an impossible goal, the affirmation of a non-realizable and distinctly non-utilitarian ‘universal community.’ The programme eviscerates the idea of community, in its everyday sense, and displays the crime, aggression and violence within communal structures, noting their importance as values within an acephalic universe of energies without direction, a play of forces in excess of bounded states or defined duty.” (6-7).
**Fin-de-Siècle Vienna and the Romantic Myth of Redemption**

Vienna’s modernism emerged somewhat later than that of Paris, with its avant-garde refusal of academic conventions in the mid-nineteenth century. Aesthetic modernism in Vienna flourished at the turn of the century, against an imperial backdrop and in a city located at the crossroads of Eastern and Western Europe, where for centuries diverging cultures, ethnicities and belief systems had collided and co-existed. The liberalism and prosperity of Vienna’s *Grunderzeit* which followed the unrest of 1848 and is recognized as the “foundational era of constitutional government that brought expansion in banking, industry and investment free of governmental intervention,” was replaced in the aftermath of the stock market crash of 1873, with a period of reactionary conservatism and staunch Catholic opposition to liberal views. Viennese modernism also emerged alongside a rich intellectual and creative climate, and instead of being entrenched in the painting of every day life or in the medium’s internal logic, it sought an antidote to the modern condition in nature and myth, in some cases attempting to give form to the dark recesses of the mind. It expressed a certain desire to retreat from the alienating effects of industrialization and embrace an aesthetic mythology that conveyed a desire for the reconciliation between body and mind, man and society, nature and history. For example, the psycho-sexual angst rendered as mortification of flesh in Egon Shiele’s self-portraits, the collective malaise depicted in Klimt’s University Murals complete from 1899 to 1907, as well as the many biblical or mythological references in Secessionist

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works convey a certain mythical modernism and romanticist melancholia which according to scholar Robert W. Whalen, seems to have permeated Viennese society at the time.\textsuperscript{290}

This particular modernist ancestry, characterized by an expression of the era’s ills through the formal conveyance of its impact on body and psyche, lends historical and art historical support to the geopolitical specificity of Actionism’s refusal and to the Actionists' pointed interest in the realms of the psychical, the sensuous and the sensual. Herewith, beyond the facile suggestion that it may have been the most transgressive language available to young artists at the time. It is not simply a question of Vienna’s imperial history and strong Catholic roots, or even its right-wing conservatism and postwar fascist flirtations providing fertile ground for transgressive resistance, but rather Vienna’s history as the setting for a very particular artistic and intellectual phenomenon at the turn of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{291} This phenomenon was neither secular nor rational. That is, its focus was not the slow recession from the strict rules governing representation, but instead it seemed intent on delving deeper into it, in a manner which expressed a drive towards the concrete, towards an expression of the totality of being, when much of the world felt increasingly fragmented. It was a modernism imbued with mysticism, fascinated by the body, the inner life of the subject and the human condition. This Viennese brand of modernism allowed itself to remain enchanted by the natural world while examining the darkness that threatened it.


\textsuperscript{291} While Catholicism’s undeniable impact is not limited to the Viennese context, I believe it is important to consider the particularly strong and persistent hold the Church maintained within Austrian collective consciousness and politics regardless of mass secularization and an intellectual climate which directly challenged its authority and doctrines. Even today, the customary greeting is in Vienna is “Grus Gott” which translates to “God greet you.”
In Vienna at the turn of the century, amidst industrial and technological innovation and growth, “the underlying mood was one of hopelessness and resignation” creating a climate in which salvation ideologies could ripen.\textsuperscript{292} In his text \textit{Sacred Spring: God and the Birth of Modernism in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna}, Robert W. Whalen quotes Viennese essayist Jean Amery as referring to \textit{fin-de-siècle} Vienna as “the capital of the spirit.”\textsuperscript{293} Beneath its austere imperial and Catholic social mores and lavish architecture, and in and amongst its coffee houses, brewed a rich intellectual and artistic undercurrent whose impact on the city’s future generations of artists cannot be underestimated. Turn of the century Vienna saw Freud’s development of psychoanalysis, Schoenberg’s dodecaphonic composition and the radical synthesis of art, architecture and craft in the output of the Vienna Secession, which spoke to a drive towards aesthetic totality with the intent of amending modernity’s fracturing of social ties.\textsuperscript{294} Indeed, the influence of the Wagnerian \textit{Gesamtkunstwerk}, a product of post-revolutionary Romantic aspirations of social and political cohesion on Vienna’s modernist aesthetic and social aims, deserves attention especially considering its manifestation in Actionism. In short, a certain “spirit” to use Amery’s words, imbued Viennese modernity which must have inspired this desire to transcend the limits of cognition, musicality, representation, and social separation.


\textsuperscript{293} As quoted by Whalen in \textit{Sacred Spring}, 3.

\textsuperscript{294} These are factors which Whalen was good to point to at the onset of his book on the subject of Vienna at the turn of the century. I recommend the reader refer to that publication in order to fill any points which may be glossed over in this text.
The Gesamtkunstwerk and the Central European Tradition of Romanticism

The Gesamtkunstwerk’s modern aesthetico-political aims were born out of revolution. They are fundamentally grounded in the nostalgic romantic belief in the public artwork’s ability to promote political harmony, as exemplified by the intertwining of the arts and communal, thus political, participation in the Athenian drama. Its modern iteration extends back to Wagner’s cry for a re-founding of society through art in the wake of the failures of 1848. The recuperation of this pre-christian model of civic religio-political engagement at a decisive turning point in western political and economic development, signals a belief in the emancipatory and communitarian potential offered by the participation in a public total art, or the merging of art and everyday life. It also acts as a symptom of this uncritical fetishization of the past, fuelling a libidinal drive toward repetition or hamartia which has shaped modern politics. The perceived revolutionary potential of public aesthetic practice set against the backdrop of social and political upheaval is something that both the French and Germanic traditions have in common although mobilized in very different ways. While France gave birth to the modern revolutionary man, Vienna gave birth to the psychological, instinctual man. Both vision of collective aesthetic practice however, were conceived or deployed in hopes of facilitating a new form of political unity, in the wake of secularization and at the threshold of massive political shifts, and both display elements of the rational and romantic obsession with social synthesis.

295 I would like to remind the reader of Jean-Luc Nancy’s thesis in the Inoperative Community whereby the nostalgia for a lost originary community has been the nodal point for Western politics. Rousseau Social Contract for example is based on the political model of ancient Sparta. This dialectical tension between progress and nostalgia informs the hamartia which operates as the substructure for this inquiry.
In France, pre-dating its concretion in Central Europe, this religio-political form of civic engagement took on the form of the *Cult of the Reason* and Robespierre’s *Festival of the Supreme Being*, which were both iconoclastic, Enlightenment driven methods of de-christianizing post-revolution France while maintaining the communitarian ethos that institutionalized religion had guaranteed. Mona Ozouf, in her text *Festivals of the French Revolution* argues that these festivals were integral to the revolutionary process and were reflective of a society attempting to initiate its own rebirth. Instead of the political harnessing the aesthetic as in the French context, in the Germanic context, this model of civic religiosity took on a more overtly artistic form where participation and reception of a new total art would forge the rise of an entirely different and egalitarian political era.

Vienna's connection to a Central European tradition of Romanticism can be located in its efforts to construct a unifying national identity, a task it continued to struggle with in the aftermath of the *Anschluss*. This is manifest mainly in the romantic historiography of the nation which emerged during the *Vormarz*, the period preceding the uprisings of 1848. History, therefore, was to shape a binding civic and patriotic consciousness and thus unite an ethnically varied group of people under a form of Imperial patriotism. This historiographic approach “was a compromise between regional and national identity” and “became more strongly oriented towards an inclusive model of the history of the German people and nation

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298 Ibid., 29-30.
in Austria.” Curiously, these romantic historical approaches to a theorization of national identity were more fully integrated in patriotic and nationalistic discourse during the events of 1848 and came to “dominate political thinking in nineteenth century Austria.” This romantic nationalistic drive towards social cohesion was made aesthetically manifest in the revolutionary total artwork of Richard Wagner who, lamenting the failure to achieve a Germanic national unity in the wake of 1848, posited the unifying potential of the communal engagement in a totalizing dramatic, musical and architectural experience.

**Wagner: Revolution and the Total Artwork**

In 1848, when the protection of bourgeois interests became a priority of the state, Wagner called for the mobilization of an old cultural paradigm suggesting that civic pride and reciprocal accountability would arise out of the natural sensuousness, *Einfühlung* or empathy, provided by a collective participation and reception of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The historical specificity of this call marks a point of connection, through revolution and political upheaval, between the French and the German preoccupation with social fragmentation. As David Robert states:

The French preoccupation with civil religion — from Rousseau to Robespierre, from St-Simon to Comte and Durkheim and beyond — sprang from the fear that the loss of the socially binding power of religion

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299 Ibid., 30.

300 Ibid., 30.
in post revolutionary society would lead to anomie, atomization, and social disintegration. Rousseau’s opposition of the whole human being, incarnated in the community, to the fragmentary existence of the socially alienated individual informs both the French and the German visions of a reconciliation between the individual and society.301

The total work of art and the creation of an aesthetic state, sprung from a desire to revive the civic religions of the ancient world, lie at the intersection of a French Enlightenment paradigm of the free and virtuous citizen and the German Romantic notion of the revolutionary and nation-building potential of the collective “spontaneous creativity of the people.”302 By the 1960s, when the state’s role as guarantor of capitalism’s continued exploitative practices had reached a boiling point and, therefore, in the midst of even greater individual and collective alienation, Actionism’s articulation of a total artwork was one which called greater attention to the body and its materiality as the ground zero of that alienation and social fragmentation.

Wagner’s vision of a coming revolution and aesthetic state was one created through the rebirth of the “great unitarian artwork of Classical Greece,” meaning the restoration of art’s political function through the communal participation in a public and total artwork, a Gesamtkunstwerk following two millennia of “Christian decadence and cultural


302 Ibid.
Looking to the Dionysian festivals of the Athenian polis, Wagner believed in the mutually constitutive roles of the total artwork and a free people through participation and collective reception.

In the *Kunst und Revolution*, Wagner laments the demise of the Athenian tragedy and consequently the loss of art’s socio-political function. The text also expresses contempt for Christianity’s hypocrisy and the ubiquitous nature of commerce while bemoaning art’s subsumption into both resulting in its further depoliticization.

This art, as it is now, fills the entire civilized world! Its true essence is industry; its ethical aim, the gaining of gold; its aesthetic purpose, the entertainment of those whose time hangs heavily on their hands. From the heart of our modern society, … our art sucks forth its life-juices, borrow a hollow grace from the lifeless relics of the chivalric conventions of medieval times… descend to the depths of the proletariate, enervating, demoralizing and dehumanizing everything on which it sheds its venom.

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303 Peter Murphy and David Roberts, *Dialectic of Romanticism: A Critique of Modernism*. (London and New York: Continuum, 2006), 47. For more on Wagner and the total artwork in relation to modernism and modernity see David Roberts, *The Total Work of Art* (2011) and Juliet Koss, *Modernism after Wagner* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). Wagner’s model of the nation-building artwork reaches back to the Dionysian festivals of Classical Greece which saw theatre, music and architecture come together to play an active and central role in the polis. When considering this discursive fixation on the correlation between art, in the form of the Greek tragedy, and collective or political harmony, it is crucial to remember that both the idea of democracy and the theatre (at once didactic for the participants and in honour of the Gods making attendance a form of civic religious practice) developed alongside each other. This placed the notion of the interdependence of public life and aesthetic experience at the forefront of a theory of collective cohesion within Western discourse. Wagner saw the disassociation of art from civic life correlate with the disintegration of social and political cohesion.

The above passage could equally have been written by Debord in the 1960s in response to the spectacle and to the exacerbation of an already existing alienated consciousness and political impotence during a postwar economic boom. Wagner clearly articulates a frustration with the conditions of the theatre within modern bourgeois and industrial society, its only purpose being to lull the modern spectator into a passive contemplative state turned apathetic after outsourcing his labour, day in and day out in exchange for a wage. Wagner’s vision of a politicization of the masses through the theatre and the arts was both romantic and anti-capitalist. Karl Marx also believed in the return of natural sensuousness to everyday life, though in the form of labour which would take on the character of pure joy or “play” when freed from slavery to the wage. Chytry expands on the impact of their respective immersion into the Bohemian communities of Paris in the 1840s:

Both the young Marx and the young Wagner were acting members of this inchoate community during their respective stays in the 1840s; both imbibed its strong invectives against the capitalist order as well as its exhilarating dreams of a post capitalist sensuous-aesthetic humanism. And for a brief

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305 See Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*. (New York: Knopf, 1985). In Vienna at the turn of the century, in the midst of a liberal culture under threat, the theatre became a refuge for the intelligentsia and served as a substitute for a public life experienced as political impotence. I find this point interesting as the theatre in Vienna became a place for the educated liberals of Vienna to share ideas. Schorske suggests that the rational intelligentsia stood as a foil for the romantic sensuous monarchy.

306 See Josef Chytry, *The Aesthetic State: A Quest in Modern German Thought* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989). Josef Chytry describes the anti-capitalism shared by Wagner and Marx to be informed by their sojourn among the Bohemian community of Paris in the 1840s. He says of this radical artistic community that “the romantic cult of artistic genius and the burgeoning religion of art discovered its first tentative social form...both the young Marx and the young Wagner were acting members of this inchoate community during their respective Paris stays in the 1840s...” (224).
period in Paris in 1848 the ‘poet at the barricades’ snatched politics from the professionals and reinstated theatre, rhetoric, and play into public human relationships, both thinkers returned to Central Europe to fight at the barricades and eventually to suffer exile for their practical participation among the radical *avant-garde.*

While Marx continued to theorize emancipation from the perspective of class, Wagner’s path centred on the artwork of the future as “the destiny of the German culture.” His experience of 1848 inspired a desire to reinstate art and play “into public human relationships.” The centrality of myth in Wagner’s work is not only apparent in his philhellenism, but also in the fact that he drew on teutonic mythology as subject matter, plus the aesthetic and thematic content of sacrifice and redemption, themes held in common with the Christian myth. The mythical character of Wagner’s art and civic religion, which would fill the vacuum left behind by communitarian religion and rescue humanity from post-revolution moral decay and isolation, also lies in the glorified idea of the unified nation state. This myth of the great nation, one rising out of an opposition to its time and civilization, would be forged and maintained by participation in, and reception of, a purely human art form. It is ironic that this unified nation state that Wagner envisioned and which would supposedly arise out of radical opposition to its contemporary civilization, reflects a grave historical oversight. If one is

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308 Ibid., 277. See Chytry’s *Aesthetic State* for a genealogy of German intellectual discourse’s Hellenism.


310 Ibid., 277.
to consider Western civilization’s historical trajectory in its totality and the envisioned state’s grounding in a political moment repeatedly emulated, from the Roman Republic to the First Republic immediately following the French Revolution, any such state would not be rising out of opposition to its time and civilization but I contend would be, at its historical core, a product of it. Thus, Wagner’s radical vision appears simply to re-inscribe old paradigms, attempting to adapt an idealized historical and political moment that is in fact the foundation of the present civilization from which it was trying to escape. This attests again to the atomistic historical view which contributes to false consciousness, as lamented by Lukács, and recursion.

Wagner found an audience in figures such as Friedrich Nietzsche, movements such as the Vienna Secession, and again in the 1960s with the Actionists. However, in Vienna this attraction towards the purely human artwork was combined with an interest in the individual psyche, that is, in mining modern man’s psychological and psychosexual depths, at once sources of individual power and great anxiety. In a city which yielded the psychoanalytical output of Freud and later Wilhelm Reich who attempted to reconcile Marxist materialist theories with Freud’s theories of the libido by claiming that sexual repression’s “chef social function is to secure the existing class structure,” Vienna stands out as the capital of a quiet

“oedipal revolt”\textsuperscript{312} and of the pursuit of repressed instinctual sensuousness in which Wagner’s spirit seemed to dwell.\textsuperscript{313} Of all of Europe’s modern capitals, Vienna saw a clash between Apollonian reason, exemplified by the conservative moral scientific values of the bourgeoisie, and the Dionysian spirit of mystical aesthetic sensuousness in which “the life of art became a substitute for the life of action. Indeed, as civic action proved increasingly futile, art became almost a religion.”\textsuperscript{314} In short, bubbling beneath the surface of a conservative Vienna was art as a means of attaining a Nietzschean “affirmation of life.” It is in this affirmation that self-forgetfulness would occur and an organic move from unnatural egoism to natural communism would be possible:

> Under the charm of the Dionysian not only is the union between man and man reaffirmed, but Nature which has become estranged, hostile or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her prodigal son, man. Freely earth proffers her gifts… Transform Beethoven’s \textit{Hymn to Joy} into a

\textsuperscript{312} Schorske, \textit{Fin-de-Siècle Vienna}, 252. Schorske uses the terms “oedipal revolt” in reference to Klimt’s allegorical use and controversial renderings of Greek mythological characters (the \textit{Jurisprudence} University Mural especially) and their reflection of an internalized personal guilt commingled with an “artistic mission to act as liberator of the instinctual life from the culture of law” (252).


\textsuperscript{314} Schorske, \textit{Fin-de-Siècle Vienna}, 8-9. For more details on the social and political conditions of \textit{fin-de-siècle} Vienna see Schorske, 7-9.
painting; let your imagination conceive the multitudes bowing to the dust, awestruck.315

This particularly Viennese condition, as well as the influence of Wagner’s vision is reflected most visibly in Klimt’s *Beethoven Frieze* from 1902 which will be further unpacked later in this chapter.316 The work expresses this Apollonian/Dionysian tension resulting in a melancholy *face à la condition humaine* which seems to have fuelled Viennese modernism. I contend a familiar spirit to be expressed in the Actionists' works, albeit imbued with sentiments of radical discontent rather than utopian optimism due to their particular historical context in the aftermath of the Holocaust and the Bomb. Nitsch’s ritualistic actions displayed, for example, the redemptive hopes of Klimt’s murals and Nietzsche’s Dionysian spirit though imbued with Christian ritualistic undertones as though to activate the source of repression in order to release or desublimate it. Between Nitsch’s manifestos which accompanied his many actions and the works’ focus on the unleashing of blocked urges through abreactive communion with materiality (matter/reality) and sensual experience, his answer to the *Gesamtkunstwerk* expressed a desire to heighten consciousness through communion with flesh in a man-

315 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (Mineloa, NY: Dover Thrift Editions).4. It may be useful to remind the reader of Nietzsche’s and Wagner’s (who wrote the preface to The Birth of Tragedy) once close relationship. This passage seems to be exactly what Klimt is depicting in the *Beethoven Frieze* which was a visual representation of Wagner’s interpretation of Beethoven’s Ninth symphony.

ner inherited from old myths and rituals. On the other hand, the self-harming explorations of Günter Brus’s actions make material and visceral the necrotic effects that an alienating contemporary condition and “civilized” self-denial have on the body and psyche.

The timeliness of Wagner’s theoretical and artistic output in relation to the romantic historicism of Austria’s vision for national identity in the mid-nineteenth century may explain Wagner’s particular influence on Vienna’s artistic and intellectual life. While Wagner’s “modern synthesis of the arts, in which the orchestra takes the place of the Greek chorus” was “intended to give life and body to the vision of social synthesis,” Actionism through their desire to merge art and life and in making visible the Bataillean notion that we are all fundamentally lacerated beings, reminds the participant of the necessity of repairing the broken individual and collective relationship with the body, thus re-enfleshing the notion of collective experience.317

**Viennese Modernism**

The Vienna Secession building, on the outskirts of the First District or the city’s historical centre, announces a clear departure from the architectural parroting which dominated


By “lacerated” Bataille means that our limit constitutes an opening to the outside and that communication demands this “violent openness” (MacKendrick, 139). Nancy in the *Inoperative Community* says: “Laceration consists only in exposure: the entire inside of the singular being is exposed to the outside, meaning our finitude, our limits constitute an opening to the outside, to the other, rather than implying an enclosed singularity.” (Mackendrick, 40).
*Grunderzeit:* Vienna of the nineteenth century. It sits on the outskirts of the *Ringstrasse,* the ring road serving as a hallmark of the *Grunderzeit’s* economic boom, and across from the Academy of Fine Art. Its location reflects the Secession’s rejection of academic conventions and of strict cultural tradition, which seemed to have been poured into the city’s imperial foundations. The building was designed by architect Josef Maria Olbrich as a shrine to a mythical brand of modernism that aimed for a total reformation of society by means of the integration of art and life through the merging of the aesthetic practices, both traditional and applied. In short, the Secession building is an ode to the *Gesamtkunstwerk.* It was meant to encompass the synthesis of architecture and the visual arts, and to stand as a material testament to the metaphysical and aesthetic aims of the movement which built it. The Vienna Secession building was to act as a beacon, pointing to a rebirth of society through the arts in the midst of a “morbid atmosphere of doom,” plagued by social separation.

The building’s stark white, symmetrical, windowless facade and central staircase read immediately as a temple. Borrowing neither a Christian nor Classical architectural vernacular, it appears to reference a more archaic form of construction, reminiscent of the rectangular and tripartite facade of Solomon’s Temple, while its lack of windows imbue it with an air of mystery. The golden floral cascade crowning the front entrance and the gilded foliated dome, which signals an ode to the architecture of eastern houses of worship, provide a contrast with

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318 The Buildings of the *Ringstrasse* which surrounds the older district of Vienna replacing the old city walls were designed to reflect and showcase Vienna’s character as a prosperous and modern Imperial capital. The buildings are of varying architectural style which are clear quotes from the past. From a Gothic inspired city hall and Votivkirche, to the Neo-Classicism of the Austrian Parliament building as well as the grand Neo-Baroque apartment buildings which line it, the *Ringstrasse* reflected a new era while looking for its expression in the aesthetics of the past.

the minimalist structure. The building’s entire composition, an interplay between geometrical construction and fanciful ornament, mirrors the period’s tension between rational order and romantic retreat into nature. The three gorgon heads sitting above the main door, representing Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture, further point to a historical reach backwards toward archaic origin. They effectively signal a modernism paradoxically intertwined with the myth and mysticism of a bygone age as well as an interest in aesthetic unity rather than fragmentation and medium specificity. Furthermore, the inscription *Ver Sacrum* on the right wing of the building’s facade, which was also the name of the Secession’s publication, further hints toward art’s sacrality in the Secessionist ethos.320 It reflects a desire to revive an idealized classical past and to the dream of a “community built by their own hands and geared towards their own aims,”321 while clinging to the mysticism of nature at a time when industrialization insisted on making it an object of scientific inquiry.

While “mythical modernism” may register as an oxymoron considering the dominant narrative’s insistence on autonomy and secularism, upon visiting the Vienna Secession’s temple to art, one can at the very least comprehend Whalen’s argument that Viennese modernism was a “religious phenomenon.”322 The Secession house materializes an innovative

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320 The literal translation of *Ver Sacrum* is Sacred Spring. The retreat to archaic origins is made very clear in the first edition of the publication in which Max Burckhardt explained the choice of name and it deserves to be quoted in full: “Whenever the tensions caused by economic antagonism had reached a climax in Ancient Rome, part of the people would leave the city...threatening to found a second Rome right there outside the ancient mother city and before the very noses of its dignified fathers, unless their wishes were fulfilled. This was known as the secession of the plebes...However, when the country was threatened by great danger, every living thing brought forth during the next spring was offered to the Gods as a Sacred Spring offering — a ver sacrum.” (R.W. Whalen, *Sacred Spring*, 114)

321 M. Burckhardt as quoted by R. W. Whalen in *Sacred Spring*, 114.

appeal towards mysticism and aesthetic totality, through the quotation of the visual language of antiquity, a nostalgic gesture which it held in common with the Enlightenment’s political project made manifest in the French Revolution and the establishment of the First Republic. However, in the Secessionist’s case, the romantic gesture was deployed as a means to counter conditions to which enlightenment was believed to have given way and understood as the roots of divisiveness and moral decay, that is, the repression of nature and instinct, and the withdrawal of myth from communal and public life. Art then was to take the place of communitarian religion as a conduit for a collective compassionate existence. The unification of the arts and the subsequent restoration of its public function, manifest in the Gesamtkunstwerk, would facilitate the organic development of civic reciprocity forged by the collective engagement in sensuous aesthetic experience.

The Gesamtkunstwerk, until recently, has been largely left out of most discussions of modernism mainly due to its association with the aestheticization of politics and National Socialism. Furthermore, it seemed diametrically opposed to medium specificity and to the teleological narrative dominating art historical discourse in the postwar period, which traced painting’s gradual move towards abstraction to its conclusion with Abstract Expressionism. Recently scholars such as Juliet Koss and David Roberts have rescued the total work of art from misinterpretation and restored its art historical significance, even the crucial role it played in the modernist narrative. The Secession’s total work of art entails

323 Alfred Barr Jr.’s flow chart for the MoMA’s Cubism and Abstract Art Exhibition from 1936 for example as well as Clement Greenberg’s influential essay American Type Painting (1955) contributed to this narrative.

324 See Juliet Koss, Modernism after Wagner (2010) and David Roberts, The Total Work of Art in European Modernism (2011)
not only a coming together of the three traditional art forms as represented by the gorgon heads on the Secession house’s facade, but the aestheticization of everyday life through the merger of the fine and applied arts. This incorporation of craft, a form of production which preceded industrial manufacturing and which implied the marriage of labour, aesthetics and utility, reflects a desire to cling to tradition while bringing an aesthetic sensuousness to quotidian existence hence imbuing labour with the quality of creative play. Ultimately, this was in hopes of rescuing humanity from the alienation and moral degeneration caused by the modern condition, tantamount to toil and drudgery, in which the aesthetic experience is subsumed by the market and segregated from individual and collective daily life. As such, the Gesamtkunstwerk would serve a political function ensuring social harmony due to daily life’s elevation to the status of aesthetic practice, including labour and political praxis. The Greek decorative motifs present in the Secession house’s sculptural program, as well as those featured in the groups exhibition ephemera, reference a nostalgic conjuring of the past as a means to free art from its contemporary constraints in hopes that it may, in turn, liberate humanity from the conditions of modern life.\textsuperscript{325} In short, the Secession and the brand of macabre expressionism which followed, manifest in the work of Egon Schiele and Oskar Kokoschka, serve as a visual manifestation of the tensions between a romanticized past and

\textsuperscript{325} Klimt’s poster for the first Secession exhibition for example as well as the numerous illustrations by Koloman Moser which resemble the black and red figures of Greek vase figure painting of the sixth and fifth centuries BCE.
an increasingly mechanized and industrialized modern condition's effects on the individual and the collective psyche.\textsuperscript{326}

\textbf{Klimt and the \textit{Beethoven Frieze}}

Klimt’s \textit{Beethoven Frieze}, conceived to be a depiction of Wagner’s interpretation of Beethoven’s \textit{Ninth Symphony}\textsuperscript{327} and now reinstalled for permanent viewing in the basement of the Secession building, was originally painted in 1902 on the occasion of the group’s fourteenth exhibition. It was intended to be an ephemeral work, painted on the exhibition walls and included a sculpture of Beethoven by artist Max Klinger. During the exhibition opening, Gustav Mahler’s version of the symphony was playing in the background. As such, the whole functioned as a total work of art comprising all the traditional artworks: architecture, painting, sculpture and music. The content of the work also expresses the revolutionary and emancipatory potential of the Wagnerian \textit{Gesamtkunstwerk}, through its facilitation of social synthesis and a sensuous return to nature. Broadly, the frieze depicts humanity’s desire for deliverance from the external pressures of earthly existence only to find that deliverance and social harmony lie in the arts. The frieze begins with Genii\textsuperscript{328} figures, representing humanity’s yearning, drifting like smoke at the top of the wall, right below the ceiling. They are de-

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{326}See Carl E. Schorkse, \textit{Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture} (New York, NY: Knopf, 1985) in which he grounds his inquiry in the relation of between politics and the psyche which shaped Viennese culture at the turn of the century.

\textsuperscript{327}For Wagner’s full interpretation of the symphony please refer to Richard Wagner's program for \textit{Beethoven's Symphony #9} trans. Ian Bent; “Ode to Joy” sections trans. Steven Ledbetter. \url{http://www.columbia.edu/itc/music/modules/summa3/summa3_print.html}.

\textsuperscript{328}Genii here refer to the spirit of a given entity whether it be a people or a time period.
\end{footnotes}
picted with eyes closed, floating in a prone position above the blank expanse below. The spirits’ procession leads the viewer to personifications of humanity’s suffering; a nude female with her hands clasped in a pleading gesture stands behind a nude couple, their heads bowed and arms outstretched in desperation. The trio’s prayers are directed toward a knight in golden armour whose back is turned to them. Above the knight floats female personifications of Ambition and Compassion; two antagonistic forces whose presence above the intended hero, I would argue, point to the conflict inherent in the human condition, an impediment to social synthesis. The frieze continues with the representation of the dark forces from which the knight, a mystical symbol of messianic deliverance, is meant to protect humanity: three gorgons and the personifications of Madness, Disease, Death, Voluptuousness, Lechery, and Excess.\textsuperscript{329} The dark figure of Typhius, the embodiment of pure evil, stretches out along the expanse of the wall. Painted on his winding serpentine body is the figure of Grief. On the last portion of the frieze, emerging from the battle against the dark forces, we see a golden figure representing music and poetry, painted in the manner of Greek vase painting. The Genii then return, now standing vertically and looking as though entranced by music and voices of a large chorale rising up triumphantly next to them. At the very end of the frieze, a male and female nude are caught in a loving embrace, a \textit{kiss to the whole world}. The body of one envelops that of the other making it difficult to see where one ends and the other begins. The battle against the earthly sources of mankind’s desperation and social discord is won, a universal brotherhood is restored, and art is that which made emancipation through love and

compassion, possible. This last portion of the frieze represents Wagner’s interpretation of the fourth movement of Beethoven’s symphony, which was composed to convey art’s revolutionary potential and humankind’s return to Nature.

Amidst the highflown sentiment of joy, proud beasts now swear a vow of universal brotherhood. We turn in ardent fervour from the embrace of all humankind to the great Creator of Nature (…) it is as if we became heirs through revelation to the seraphic belief that every man is created for joy. In all the force of strong conviction, we cry across to one another: “Be embraced, ye millions! This kiss to the whole world!” (…) To the gentle delights of happiness in joy now succeeds jubilation. As we clasp the world to our breast, excitement and exultation fill the air like the thundering of the heavens and the roaring of the seas, set in perpetual motion and healing vibration, which quicken the earth and preserve it for the joy of men, to whom God gave the world so that he might find happiness there.330

This excerpt references a return to a collective existence, a mass raising of consciousness based on the awareness, achieved in common, that it is in finding harmony with Nature where man finds joy. This romantic sentiment posits a joyous deliverance through a communion with the natural world from which modern man has been severed. There is a distinct move away from an approach where instrumental reason, moral control, and individuation figure as the vehicles for emancipation. It is also a stark contrast from the Enlightenment ar-

argument that freedom’s attainment lies in the dispelling of myth and the acquisition of knowledge through scientific inquiry and mastery over the natural world.\textsuperscript{331} It also speaks to a prevailing concern among Viennese intellectuals and artists at the start of the twentieth century right up to the First World War; an atmosphere of chaos and crisis in a rapidly growing capital at the centre of a multi-ethnic rural Empire, wedged between a loyalty towards aristocratic rule, oppressive and anti-semitic Christian municipal politics, and an increasingly politically impotent Liberal intelligentsia.\textsuperscript{332} This particular modern condition seemed increasingly incompatible with the inner workings of the human psyche around the close of the nineteenth century, a sentiment made manifest in the melancholic expressionism of Schiele and Kokoshka and in Arthur Schnitzler’s critical and sexually provocative literary works.\textsuperscript{333}

\textit{Fin-de-siècle} Vienna thus stood at the intersection of a moralistic-scientific thrust and an aesthetic sensuousness.\textsuperscript{334} Aesthetically and ideologically, the reparation of social separation through the re-naturalization of man and through the communal embrace of the aesthetic in everyday life is part of the romantic modernist ancestry which the Actionists inherited. It is due to this particular ancestry, one entrenched in the examination of individual and collective embodiment and psyche, and in the restoration of communal ties beyond the institutional models offered by politics and religion, that I understand the Actionists’ work as taking up

\textsuperscript{331} See Adorno and Horkheimer, \textit{Dialectic of Enlightenment} (2002).

\textsuperscript{332} For more on the context of turn of the century Vienna see Carl E. Schorske (1985), Robert Whalen (2007).

\textsuperscript{333} See Chapter I of Schorske, \textit{Fin-de-Siècle Vienna}, (1985) where he describes the totalizing character of Maurice Ravel’s composition \textit{La Valse} which the author argues speaks to the chaos and crisis enveloping the period and the violent death of the modern world in the aftermath of WWI.

\textsuperscript{334} See Chapter I of Schorske, \textit{Fin-de-Siècle Vienna}, (1985).
the unfinished business of history. While France’s obsession with social separation manifested itself on the level of the political, in terms of refashioning the state, and maintained through the glorification and repetition of an identity-forming revolutionary tradition, Vienna, in perpetual search for a national identity from the mid-nineteenth century to the end of the Anschluss, appears to have looked beyond the political for answers to social fragmentation. Instead, it took on an excavation of fragmentation’s corporeal and psychical grounding and manifestations, and sought answers in art’s ability to mobilize a collective corporeality. Thus this aforementioned unfinished business of history appears to have been more present in Vienna precisely due to its recursive return to the aesthetic means of suturing a historically contingent collective wounding manifest in a fragmented body politic. A narrow contextualization of Actionism would therefore not account for Actionism’s located-ness in Vienna or answer the question posed by Dr. Badura-Triska’s which opened this chapter. Therefore, from a historical and art historical point of view, there would be no way of distinguishing Austria from other European countries, or account for Actionsim’s outburst, without the longue durée as it exposes the enduring persistence of myth in an Austria which never secularized and the persistence of the body within a Viennese modernism that never fully rid itself of the figure. Actionism’s “barricades” in the 1960s therefore, would not be made of brick and stone, but of flesh and bone. The very materials which modernity and modernism had exploited and abstracted.

Considering the Actionists’ so-called post-modern context; a postwar era which questioned modernity’s narrative of progress and emancipation, their work sits at the crossroads of a dialectic, or even as a synthesis of the two discursive and aesthetic trajectories which
shaped modernity; Enlightenment and Romanticism. Romanticism countered Enlightenment in its vision of history as nature and with a conception of a coming community that is formed with the “spirit of a people as the source of all creative powers.” It was redemptive and mythical as opposed to rational and political. The Actionists’ context within post-WWII Austria also places them in a unique position considering the country’s complicity in the horrors perpetrated by the Nazis which were increasingly being examined, by the likes of Adorno and Horkheimer for example, as emblematic of modernity’s failure and of instrumental reason’s capacity to justify horrific state-led violence. In terms of painting, an inquiry into Actionism allows for the possibility of an alternate modernist narrative, one less governed by the pursuit of flatness or the given medium’s formal constraints. In other words, one less focused on abstraction or the gradual erosion of reference to the sensible world, but rather focused on the concrete expression of History’s impact on Nature with its most “sacred” entity, the human body, at its centre. While works such as Schiele’s self-portraits and Klimt’s depictions of humanity’s anguish in the likes of the Beethoven Frieze or the University Murals reflected the duress experienced by the individual and collective body, the radical recrudescence of the body and its material self-assertion in the Actionists’ work in the aftermath of

335 In his text, Schorske describes this unique intersection in Viennese culture a setting it apart from other great cities in Europe. He argues that the Liberal bourgeoisie which was rooted in reason and law, to seek civic participation in the aesthetic life of the city (theatre and art) stood in contrast to the aristocratic culture “of sensuous feeling and grace.” I direct the reader to this book to gain a greater understanding of fin-de-siècle Vienna as a world of internal conflict and contradiction.

336 Murphy and Roberts, Dialectic of Romanticism, 69.

337 I view both Enlightenment and Romanticism as being guilty of the nostalgic idealization Nancy discusses in The Inoperative Community and which has become the foundations of modern politic; the enlightenment in the political and administrative ideal of the citizen assembly in the agora, and romanticism in the aesthetic and religious participation of the polis in the amphitheatre. For more see Murphy and Roberts, Dialectic of Romanticism (2006).
abstraction, exposed the historically contingent degradation of the natural world. The overt, and at times disturbing, display of sensuous “stuffness,” makes manifest a withdrawal from, and exploitation of, nature in terms of the living body. It makes visible and visceral that which is imperceptible, or beyond immediate experience, due to the nature of Time as discussed in the previous chapter. That is, due to time’s equivalence to the money form by way of the wage; it is exteriorized, brought out of the body as is labour in the form of the commodity. Thus time can never be fully experienced in the “here and now,” escaping consciousness as part of hamartia. Also, because time can only be experienced retrospectively, through the recording of history which, as mentioned in the opening of Chapter I, we struggle to collectively and stably orient ourselves in relation to it. Consequently, the work therefore displays the erosion of materiality and its mirroring in painting as well as that erosion's slippage from consciousness, while also acting as a total refusal of the cultural processes responsible for that dematerialization and the lived conditions which it led to.

In kind, both Viennese modernism and Actionism demonstrate a desire for the re-naturalization of man. Furthermore, an art historical heritage focused on totalization rather than segregation of the arts, one that championed their synthesis and the belief in that synthesis’ wider impact on social cohesion through everyday, embodied, communal engagement, is one of the reasons this particular radical form of performance happened in Vienna specifically. While both these iterations of total art in Vienna bracket National Socialism, their aim should not be confused with the aestheticization of politics or the deployment of aesthetic strategies as a means to act upon a population in an effort to gain and maintain political power. In his text The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, Walter Benjamin states
that, with capitalism’s “mass proletarianization of modern man,” fascism attempted to “organize the newly proletarianized masses while leaving intact the property relations which they strive to abolish.” While “the masses have the right to changed property relations; fascism seeks to give them expression in keeping these relations unchanged” and thus, “the logical outcome of fascism is an aestheticizing of political life.” Crucial to the conditions for aestheticization of politics to arise, is the firmly installed political economy which divided the collective into masses along class lines and which made the state, the guarantor of one class’ exploitation of another. To consider fascistic the Gesamtkunstwerk itself, its elaboration by Wagner in 1848, is firstly anachronistic. Such a suggestion disregards the materialist development of history which created the conditions for fascism to emerge in the 1930s. Indeed, fascism rose out of capitalism’s divisiveness and thus borrowed capitalism’s mass consumerism and aesthetics to its political advantage. Conversely, in the 1960s, the Actionists' brand of totalization functioned to negate any institutional or political model of collective intimacy, as blatantly expressed in the University Action which opened the last chapter. Instead, their aim was the politicization and aestheticization of that which has been eroded, that which has been disciplined by both capitalism and the State: the body.

For Wagner, the total artwork revealed aesthetic experience as an integral part of life, as springing from the organic creativity of the people and a creative capacity which is removed from the discourse of production. In this way, the total art, as a collective aesthetic

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339 Ibid.
experience, becomes a form of direct action by way of embodied participation and reception.\textsuperscript{340} It would facilitate therefore a consciousness of body and embodiment. One, as per Wagner’s text quoted above, which would naturally encourage a universal reciprocity, through a communion with nature that from which man has been gradually detached. In other words, Romanticism’s “counter logic to modernity which is based on a radically new conception of nature as immanence,” the return of Myth as the spiritual experience of an originally and universal fellowship, and the return to nature from which the Cartesian subject had been alienated, are made manifest in the Gesamtkunstwerk.\textsuperscript{341}

**Enlightenment, Romanticism and Capitalism**

As discussed in the previous chapter regarding the Enlightenment, with the rise of a mechanized world view at the centre of which man reigned as supreme being, came a nostalgia for an individual and collective condition preceding the split between the historical and social world of man, and the organic world of nature. A time believed to precede the tyranny brought on by the christianization of the western world, when man could attain complete freedom through the marriage of full political participation and cultural production.\textsuperscript{342} In re-

\textsuperscript{340} In his text *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism* (2011), David Roberts emphasizes participation and reception as crucial to the total work of art as revolutionary festival of the people through its dissolution of the modern boundaries between the stage and spectator. “Thus the goal of the total work would be the elimination of all objectifying and distancing frames and boundaries in and through the participation —in ever winding circles of totalization—of audience, community, people, or nation.” (10).

\textsuperscript{341} Murphy and Roberts, *Dialectic of Romanticism*, 69.

\textsuperscript{342} See Chytry’s discussion of Winckelmann in *The Aesthetic State* (1989). He locates him at the beginning of this German discursive obsession with the aesthetic state as a fundamentally Hellenistic fetish. (30)
sponse to the dispelling of myth by enlightened reason came the birth of new myths namely the primacy of the individual, unbound by rational thought and free to explore the recesses of his mind and heart, the nobility of the human spirit and natural world, and a new understand-
ing of nationhood articulated through the notion of an organic and aesthetic historicism.343 The nation would serve both as the guarantor of individual freedom through participatory citizenship and act as ideological and organic connective tissue suturing the citizen body within the myth of a common ethnic ancestry and collective creative genius.344 This is the root of the modern German discursive obsession with social separation and its theorization through the notion of the aesthetic state which flourished between the mid-eighteenth to the late twentieth century. It correlates with a period which saw vast scientific progress, economic growth, demographic shifts along with the overthrow of regimes and the withdrawal from

343 In Dialectic of Romanticism (2006), Murphy and Roberts explain how two “concepts of origin and foundation confront each other” with the birth of the modern state and the French Revolution with a divided Germany feeling this division of modernity more acutely than any other part of Europe. “The intellectual hegemony of French civilization, reinforced by the imperialism of the revolutionary na-
tion-state, overdetermined the critique of a soulless, mechanical enlightenment…The dominant west-
ern model of enlightenment was closely linked to an alternate redemptive vision of modernity, through which an as yet unborn Germany would attain its essential destiny as the heartland of Europe. …Like the enlightenment, romanticism is informed and carried by a reflexive historical conscious-
ness born of the break with the closure of tradition. The quest for denaturalization is that of histori-
cism divided against itself. …Romantic historicism is haunted by this sense of presence and absence reflected in the distinction between organic and aesthetic historicism….Organic historicism grasps the second nature of naturalization as the living spirit of a people that informs all its institutions. …aesthetic historicism, which grasps origin, foundation and creation more originally, more profoundly as the very spirit of the living spirit…as the spiritualization of nature, whose highest manifestation is the creative imagination.” (5-6).

344 This is another reason why the Austrian case, Vienna especially being its capital, is so particular since it was the centre of a multi ethnic empire complicating its vision as a nation in terms of a Germanic notion tied to Blood and Soil. By the nineteenth century, the massive influx of people into Vi-
enna from the rural periphery and the rise of a myth of nation would have created ripe conditions for racial tension and pointed anti-semitic sentiment to be rampant. This should be taken into considera-
tion when attempting to answer the question which opened this chapter, “Why in Vienna?” Why this preoccupation with the body and bodies in Vienna as evidence by the art and intellectual output of the nineteenth century and fin-de-siècle (Freud, then later Reich) and the radical work of the Actionists in the 1960s.
oppressive institutionalized belief systems culminating finally with two catastrophic world wars. In other words, the pursuit of the aesthetic state, is a distinctly modern phenomena. While the Enlightenment reflected the emergence of the individual subject from beneath the shadow of myth and blind dedication to progress and domination of nature through scientific inquiry, Romanticism’s equally blind nurturing of the myth of the nation and its drive to seek liberation from the alienating effects of mechanized society through re-naturalization proved to have been equally destructive. It was so by contributing to the rise of violent superpowers such as the Nazi regime with its rallying cry of “blood and soil”, coupled with a capitalist, and I argue fundamentally Christian, ethics of penitential toil which it touted as the key to freedom within the coming community.

Ironically, Romanticism, just as the Enlightenment which it sought to counter, was also plagued by a blind loyalty to its own internal (mytho)logic and to its socio-political aesthetic revolving around organic political unity, fashioned in the likeness of communities preceding man’s split from Nature. Its fetishization of a natural “future historical” social cohesion, I argue, functions as the other side of hamartia’s coin. Thus, there are common mo-

345 In Dialectic of Romanticism (2006), Murphy and Roberts say: “Although romantic nationalism is modern in its dynamic, it responds to modernization primarily in terms of its perceived threats to social integration. The stereotypical opposition of organic community and mechanical society, individualism and holism, looks to the nation as the source of the reintegration of the individual. The individual finds through his birth into the community his transpersonal identity in the national religion of the people.” (46)

346 I view this manifest in the words Arbeit Mach Frei on the gates of Auschwitz, which arguably encompass a national socialist ethos applicable to those inside and outside the camps.

tives fuelling the tensions between Enlightenment and Romanticism; the blind commitment to their own inner logic and an obsession with the overcoming of social separation, with the fate of the individual natural body hanging in the balance. That is, Enlightenment subordinated the natural body to the faculties of reason effacing its significance to political cohesion while Romanticism placed a particular body at the centre of its political hopes; the sacrality of the collective body of the nation implying the exclusion of bodies which did not fit the parameters of its organic political vision. Thus both paved the way for the rationalization of violence and the legitimization of exclusion or “othering.” In this way both these discursive and political trajectories left the body vulnerable to apparatuses of power, including capitalism which could prosper from the body’s mechanical/productive capacities on the one hand and ensnare it within its own libidinal compulsion to repeat on the other. Ironically, capitalism, which tethered itself to the state at the beginning of our longue durée, was itself repeating an oppressive system of the past; that of the Church with its moralizing economy of debt and guilt. Thus as of 1848, and returning to the topic of recursion, instead of the progress of chronological time as a historical march forward towards emancipation, we have the recursive reinstating of an eschatological time where guilt is replaced with debt, and

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348 Thomas Nipperday, as per Murphy and Roberts, Dialectic of Romanticism, states: “…the discovery of the historical unconscious of a people was the great achievement of romanticism. The heritage of the original, spontaneous expression of national spirit must be protected from foreign influences and the danger of foreign imitation.” (45-46).

349 For more see Murphy and Roberts, Dialectic of Romanticism, 75-76.
penance with labour, all enforced by and within the (purgatorial) space of the state.\textsuperscript{350} Hence I view capitalism, as the common denominator and underlying structure dictating the development of both these divergent discursive and praxical trajectories, ultimately leading to the repetition of oppressive models of social rebirth.

**The Total Art and Action**

Wagner’s work points to a distinctly German, romantic and modern pursuit of an aesthetic state which countered the French rational model born out of the Revolution. However, both were pulled from the same uncritical idealization of the civilizations of antiquity, and deployed for the sake of collective cohesion and the rebirth of a society.

The events of 1848 in France and Germany provided Wagner “with the seed…for a political commitment to ideas of freedom combined with action.”\textsuperscript{351} I stress the term *action* here because for Wagner, as Alan David Aberbach has pointed out, in order to arrive at a solution for political and social problems “talk alone was not a viable option. Action was necessary.”\textsuperscript{352} Considering Wagner’s significant influence and impact within both philosophical/political and aesthetic discourse, especially within the germanic lands, this sentiment would be relatively part of the Actionists’ aesthetic DNA. Art as action, which would necessarily

\textsuperscript{350} Murphy and Roberts in *Dialectic of Romanticism* mention “eschatological time” in relation to Heidegger. “The essential time of history comprises on the one hand the eschatological time of the first and last things, and on the other hand, the mythical time of repetition.” (11)

In this case, I contend that capitalism imitates the Church’s forms of temporal, moral and economic domination, and refashions it to suit its own purpose. Yet another repetition or re-inscription of old models of domination.


\textsuperscript{352} Ibid., 21.
imply the mobilization of the body with the body being the limit of both capitalism and politics, would seem to be an appropriate tactic for aesthetico-civic action within a conservative postwar climate, wedged between American economic imperialism and lingering fascism and in which political impotence among the youth was widely felt. Action, or the productive potential of the event itself would then be a key focus of their aesthetic and revolutionary praxis.

For Wagner, action meant the performance of what he called political overtures, a unique “German contribution to a synthesis of daemonic music and Shakespearean poetry” coupled with “the model of the Athenian polis as the integration of aesthetic and public life.” In Wagner’s total art resides the aspirations of German Romanticism and the germanic discursive pursuit of an “aesthetic state.” The notion of the aesthetic state, defined as “a social and political community that accords primacy…to the aesthetic dimension in human consciousness and activity,” is an integral part of the German history of ideas extending from the eighteenth century onwards from Winkleman to Hegel, and from Marx to Marcuse as extensively examined by Josef Chytry in *The Aesthetic State: A Quest in Modern German Thought*. While the co-mingling of aesthetics and politics is seen as a brutal development of the twentieth century, from an art historical point of view, I would argue that it predates National Socialism, even the eighteenth century, by a few hundred years. For example, Counter Reformation Rome in the late sixteenth century proves to be a moment when a religious, though fundamentally political agenda, took on an aesthetic form in a deliberate manner.


354 Ibid., xii.
ner since the slow fragmentation of the Roman Empire. During the Counter Reformation, art and architecture, adhering to strict representational and formal rules, were deployed by the Catholic Church as a declaration of its symbolic victory against the Protestant Reformation. The Baroque style of the late sixteenth to the late seventeenth centuries is an example of the formal language of a Christian religiously and politically motivated use of aesthetics at a time of crisis, deployed with a synthesizing intent.355

Desacralization and Depoliticization

In his text on the significance of the total work of art to European modernism, David Roberts describes Wagner’s pin-pointing of a moment of communal and aesthetic-political collapse within a specific historical moment. He writes: “Wagner identifies the moment of decline as the sundering of the unity of art, religion and politics in the polis….Religion withdrew, abandoning political life to egoistic, absolute, singular man.”356 The desacralization of the festival drama led to its fragmentation into its various constituent parts. This fragmentation of the dramatic event which united singular beings into a communal brotherhood, was understood as resulting in the breakdown of that communal bond.357 The withdrawal of myth from the public and aesthetic life of the polis, specifically from art in the form of the great

355 The works of Gian Lorenzo Bernini such as the Baldacchino and the Throne of St-Peter (1623-34) both in Saint Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City, and the Ecstasy of St-Teresa (1647-52) in Rome, are examples of the synthesis of artistic mediums (architecture and sculpture) and thus a form of total artwork.

356 Roberts, Total Work of Art, 71-72.

357 I use the term “brotherhood” because only Athenian men were granted citizenship, a point which will be returned to in Chapter III.
tragedy which was the highest form of participation in public civic life was therefore the reason for art’s depoliticization. The fragmentation of the synthesis between art and public action, coinciding historically with the establishment of democratic self-determination, led to a loss of art’s political purpose; a fragmented total artwork could only mean fragmentation within the social political body. 358

Wagner’s praxis prescribed the sacrifice of the individual art and individual citizen to the totality through which that passage from egoism to communism would be realized. The redemption provided by the self-sacrifice of one’s own individual concerns realized through participation in the unified public art “is tied to its critical function as political aesthetic vanguard in and against a world of alienation.” 359

The impetus behind the development of the Athenian tragedy was the complex relationship between gods and mortals and was, at its core, “an expression of the city-state (polis), that explored the ethical quandaries of human beings in conflict with gods and with one another in the context of a polis-like community.” 360 Participation in the festival meant collectively honouring the god and thus insuring that they would continue to bless the community. An offence against the gods would surely bring on a catastrophe affecting the entire social body. Participation in festivals and processions was an integral part of acting in accordance

358 Roberts, Total Work of Art, 72.

359 Roberts, Total Work of Art, 74.

Also, The public performance of religious and civic life made manifest in the Athenian tragedy which unified the citizen body within a public aesthetic domain, is key to Wagner’s theory of redemption, where the individual submits their singular interests to a communal human essence.

with a moral obligation towards the polis, for the sake of the welfare of each citizen thus making it a political act. When religion or myth withdrew from tragedy with the rise of philosophy, so did the artwork’s function as being of and for the polis, thus evacuating it of its political function and removing the moral obligation that each citizen has towards the citizen body. It expunged the tragedy’s redemptive function whereby the individual’s entrance into the totality through participation allowed the sacrifice of self-interest for the sake of the whole. The withdrawal of myth then meant the disintegration of the total artwork. Art becomes privatized and the public aesthetic sphere becomes an arena for spectacle and as such is subsumed into the dominant spirit of its time. In the nineteenth century the dominant spirit was the rise of capitalism and industrial production. In the twentieth century, it was totalitarianism and mass consumer society.\textsuperscript{361}

With the withdrawal of myth and ritual, historically both apparatus’ of governance and social control to which society has become accustomed and which instilled accountability to the whole through the threat of damnation or persecution, the fragmentation internal to the individual grew to exacerbate alienation from others within he community. Myth and ritual also became the revolutionary aesthetic of choice, as proven by the festivals of the French Revolution, Wagner’s overtures and some of the performance art which emerged out of the postwar period. Here, the shamanism of Yves Klein and Joseph Beuys comes to mind. When other parts of Europe sought greater emancipation from myth and its authority figures, whether the aristocracy or the Church, in Vienna myth seems to have lingered, so that even

\textsuperscript{361} In the case of totalitarianism, exemplified by the Nazi regime, the public aesthetic domain is utilized by the State to push a political agenda as opposed to public participation and, by virtue of that participation, creation of it own public aesthetic sphere, its work, through which a politics of and for the people would arise.
the melancholic *Foehn* winds could not sweep it away; its perfume mixing with the rich aromas permeating Vienna’s cafes, clinging to the decorative cornices of its imperial architecture and finally finding sanctuary in a temple beyond the *Ringstrasse*. Thus art within the modern context, because of the withdrawal of myth, is no longer connected to public life. This implies an alienation, not only of art through its privatization, but of the individual in relation to the social body. Modernity made production and consumption the primary focus of the collective, only leading to further alienation. However, unlike the revolutionary moment of the mid-nineteenth century, in the twentieth century leading up to the postwar period, the very conditions set up by modernity diminished consciousness of that alienation, further reducing the possibility for revolution and encouraging the further privatization of art as well as its assimilation into the culture industry. Guy Debord and the Situationist International lamented this condition and the reduction of social relations under capital to the spectacle, arguably not a new phenomena or one exclusive to capital. Just as other oppressive conditions, dynamics and discourses which it inherited, the spectacle as the saturation of culture by images in a manner which allows power to exert itself upon a population, had already been deployed by political regimes from the Roman Empire to National Socialism.

**Fascism and the Aestheticization of Politics**

The total art and its communizing potential took on a very different connotation after the second World War than that conveyed in the *Beethoven Frieze*. National Socialism cast away the notion of a society of pure joy fashioned through the embrace of mankind with Nature implied by the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, only to employ it as the aesthetic means for the real-
ization of authoritarian totality based on a nationalistic myth of ethnic purity. Fascism arose as a commingling of enlightenment’s ability to cruelly act according to its own inner logic and the romantic flight into prelapsarian origin. While Reason built the trains, railways and camps, Myth fuelled the salutes, the rallies and ultimately, the incinerators. The sacrality of teutonic purity given form in the idea of the nation, gave rise to Nazism’s politics. The Third Reich effectively fashioned itself in the image of the aesthetic state in terms of a Germanic nationhood hoped for by Wagner after 1848. The grand musical drama’s of Bayreuth gave way to the spectacle of nationalistic fervour exemplified by *The Triumph of the Will*, and to participation as civic commitment to the German body politic. Of course that commitment to nation and body politic rationalized the internment and extermination of “dangerous” bodies, most notably the Jewish body. The body, ritual and myth all converged prominently in the aesthetics and politics of Fascism and the Wagnerian conception of the total work of art. Fascism’s so called aestheticization of politics influenced by Wagner’s vision has been a reason for its dismissal in the aftermath of the War. While Fascism operated in service of the myth of the nation, Wagner’s total artwork was more pointedly focused on coming to an organic solution to social separation through aesthetic reception or *Einfühlung* which

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362 It is no secret that Wagner’s nationalism was coupled with anti-semitic sentiment which was virulent particularly in Vienna from the late nineteenth century onwards. While there is a nationalistic undertone to Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk* that must be considered in relation to the historical circumstances of Germany at the time Wagner developed his theories. Murphy and Robert’s in *Dialectics of Romanticism* point out that “Wagner envisaged a universal not national revolution in 1849.” (52) As per Wagner’s prose, he cared to see the rise of “the universal fellowship of all mankind” in the wake of the fallen “natural kinship of natural community” which was manifest in the Grecian Nature-State and lost with its transformation into the Political State with the fragmentation of Greek tragedy. I believe, therefore, that the nationalism associated with the *Gesamtkunstwerk* should not be overstated or overshadow the wider communistic exigency it expresses.

363 For more the role of myth in the rise of fascism, see David Roberts, *The Total Work of Art*, 97.
loosely translates to a sense of empathy. The Secession’s aim on the other hand was to ease a collective malaise independently from the notion of nation, the myth itself being this collective existence based out of mutual love and sprung from nature and out of the shared experience of art. I view the Actionists to have inherited the Secession’s retreat into nature, though their retreat was more poignantly into the body’s materiality. They did so however while revolting against the romantic notion and historical manifestation of an “aesthetic state” and against the oppressive constructs resulting from mechanized society’s attempt to harness nature and bodies by means of instrumental reason and scientific inquiry. I contend that the Actionists’ intent was to deploy the body as a vehicle for emancipation from both the boundaries of the traditional medium as well as from the tyranny of History. They did so through procedural violence, eroticism and through ritualistic experimentation with everyday materiality.

**Procedural Violence: The M-Apparatus and Abreaction**

In the aftermath of National Socialism, the Holocaust and the Bomb, the message became abundantly clear that the state held the monopoly on violence, whether perpetrated against citizens or against civilians of a foreign power. This reality has only become exacerbated today with the increased militarization of police, the ubiquity of surveillance and the condemnation of activist violence perpetrated by black block groups. While today, violence has become a normalized part of the state’s means of maintaining social control over its citizens, after the sobering events of World War II and the mass murder of citizens executed with systematic precision and rationalized as a means of protecting the ethnic purity of the nation, the West’s historical narrative of civility, and the state’s role as benevolent protector of its
citizens came sharply under question.\textsuperscript{364} However, at a time when a tremendous loss of life and collective exposure to a common finite materiality could have led to a collective refusal of state led violence, instead reactionary conservatism driven partly by the fear engendered by the Cold War as well as the distraction afforded by the spectacle of advanced capital and a booming consumer culture, maintained a shell-shocked public largely under control. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the state’s rise as an external apparatus of control, fostering democracy and capitalism’s co-dependence, made violence part and parcel of state administration. Firstly there is the latent violence of the wage which forced the majority of the population to submit to an oppressive self-disciplining under the guise of freedom. Then there is the violence necessarily implied by the bureaucratic administration of a nation in which the mandate of democratic governance (\textit{Liberté! Égalité! Fraternité!}) is usurped by the spirit of an exploitative political economy to which it is interconnected.\textsuperscript{365} These forms of latent violence, deployed and tolerated under the false promise of individual freedom, are scarcely different from the ideological and doctrinal violence used by the institutions the modern West had overthrown. The toppling of the myths of aristocracy, of salvation and eternal damnation, and their replacement with the equally brutal myth of the nation and market as guarantors of freedom, paved the way for the submission to political and economic violence. I argue that it is against this type of violence, and by giving form to violence through procedure as a radical aesthetic strategy, that Actionism sought to resist and respond to repression and alienation.

\textsuperscript{364} With this, I argue that the discourse and praxis of Enlightenment and Romanticism as the warp and weft of modernity becomes apparent. Therefore the narrative that instrumental reason alone was to blame for modernity’s ultimate failure is refuted.

\textsuperscript{365} By this I mean whether through juridicial or physical means such as policing, incarceration, surveillance etc.
In a text written in 1969, Otto Muehl recounts an aesthetic breaking point that gave rise to what he called material actions or aesthetic events of “psychosis produced by the mingling of human bodies, objects and material.” In 1961, while daubing paint on a canvas, Muehl suddenly realized the futility of the exercise and proceeded to slash the canvas with a kitchen knife, tearing at it with his hands, chopping at the support with an axe and stomping on what remained before pouring paint over it, wrapping it with wire and hanging the lot back onto the wall. Muehl stated that through the process he had inadvertently become a sculptor. Key to this anecdote is the productive potential lying within the destructive impulse. Dissatisfied with mere gestural painting or with the body appearing within the confines of the canvas solely in the form of a trace, which had haunted the practice since Pollock, Muehl proceeded to act, even violently so, upon painting itself. That is, not only upon the object but upon its parameters which had limited the productive capacity of the artist’s body along with his organic creative impulses. This form of procedural violence is familiar within painting at this time. Jaleh Mansoor in her text *Marshall Plan Modernism: Italian Postwar Abstraction and the Beginnings of Autonomia*, outlines the destructive tactics employed by artists such as Lucio Fontana who slashed and perforated the surface, and Alberto Burri who burned and melted it, placing them in dialogue with US economic imperialism as well as the rise of Autonomist Marxism in postwar Italy. She relates this procedural violence, enacted upon the picture plane, to the latent violence implied by the labour-to-wage relation in the midst of the Italian economic miracle. While the specific geopolitical contexts differ, the violent, destruc-

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tive-productive impulses are similar and so are the post-fascist conditions of both Italy and Austria. Furthermore, while these Italian and Austrian examples of procedural violence may be considered in reaction to state violence and capitalist exploitation, the Austrian example was also in reaction to a particularly repressive conservative climate rife with hypocrisy, and this against the backdrop of an aesthetic and intellectual history and discourse which were inextricably intertwined with psyche and body. This, therefore, sheds light upon the Vienna Actionists' rather romantic gesture of re-naturalizing painting by replacing the canvas and the figure with the fleshly, material body.

In the same text as previously mentioned, Muehl states that following his destructive explorations with everyday objects such as pipes, pots and prams, with which he had become dissatisfied, he moved on to using bodies. Only then did he feel his project was moving in a new productive direction, away from the artifact and towards embodied action. On the occasion of *Die Blutorgel* (1962), the first Actionist event involving colleagues Hermann Nitsch and Adolf Frohner, and which was accompanied by manifestos outlining the future direction of their work, Muehl published *The M-Apparatus*. The text outlined the primitive instincts, impulses and intentions behind his actions while expressing a desire to transgress conventional morality and this, out of moral obligation and ethical concern. He states: “As soon as the Austrian stirs in me, I switch on the M-Apparatus to avoid getting ulcers” and “M-ing is an unbroken chain of violence and blasphemy.”

I understand this as Muehl expressing a disdain for a learned identity and “way of being” associated with national belonging and suffering the imprint of cultural history. He describes the creative actions which make up his

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process such as defiling, smearing, scratching, tearing apart, slashing open, perforating, drilling, dismembering, tormenting, violating, torturing and finally crucifying. These actions, or “work by means of madness,” conducted with everyday materials including the body, would translate into a “life affirming, orgiastic festival of the creative.” Violence as transgression against established norms is overtly expressed as the intention behind the work but also as its form and content, and this, activated by the body and its instinctual drives which within the increasingly mechanized political economy of the 1950s and 60s, had been redirected towards production. Consequently, in this case, therefore, procedural violence is deployed, on the one hand, against the history of modernist aesthetics by defiling its strict parameters. Alternatively, it is used as a means of resisting the violence inherent in a recursive history which abolishes and reinstates oppressive civilizing projects and political economies that have brutally suppressed and instrumentalized the body through its labour. Muehl’s destruction, whether of actual material objects or of meaning in his use of everyday substances such as jam, eggs and other foodstuffs as paint, disrupting the meaning of both painting and food, are acts of affirmation of a new emancipated form of being, an attempt at escaping determination which should not be conflated with a refutation of being in general. Indeed Muehl’s early texts evoke Georges Bataille’s thoughts on violence expressed in the aforementioned Programme, published in 1936 which preceded Acephale, but nevertheless lay the groundwork for his ideas of an acephalic community. The text construes the act of destruction as an accomplishment in its “refusal to submit to the dominant order of Western life at

Muehl and Nitsch “Festival of Psycho-Physical Naturalism,” in Green, Writings of the Vienna Actionists, 81.

I would like to remind the reader of the Nietzschean undertone of this language.
the time, when the homogenizing forces of society were reaching a state of political and his-
torical crisis, but for which there was no political solution.” Destruction is thus in oppo-
tion to the established order of things, to meaning and to servility, or rather civility, as de-
 fined and enforced by the intellectual discourses and political economies that led to bar-
barism and repression. This condition would, of course, have been even more apparent to
Muehl after the War than it already was to Bataille in the years preceding it. Through de-
struction, Bataille was calling “for an entirely different way of being,” just as Muehl did after
him. Much of this was tied to Bataille’s career long interest in community or rather on the
depoliticization of collective experience, that which Wagner sought to facilitate with a total
artwork.

Bataille was interested in the community building potential presented by the experi-
ence of extreme states; as a sacrificial project which, in turn, Nancy opposes in his work on
community, based on Bataille’s work, due to its inherent nostalgia for the sacred and the dan-
ger of the community becoming a “work of death” in its obsession with sacrifice. It is
worth mentioning that Bataille and Nancy’s response bookended National Socialism.
Bataille’s work predated the full extend of Nazi horrors, while Nazism presented Nancy with
one such example of a community of death and provided him with grounds to oppose aspects
of Bataille’s thinking of community. Later, Bataille moved away from this nostalgic thinking
of the archaic community of the sacred, focusing on erotic experience as example of extreme

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371 Ibid., 3.

372 Morin explains Nancy’s concern: “The only way that a loss without gain could occur is if the par-
ticipants would also commit suicide.” (Jean-Luc Nancy, 81).
According to Bataille, by being non-productive and pure expenditure, these extreme states would give rise to a community that is not caught up in the discourse and practice of production and accumulation. While it is evident that Muehl’s work is based on disruption and destruction as outlined in his texts, I would not venture so far as to suggest that his material actions possessed any communitarian intentions in the same manner that Nitsch’s had, and this despite Muehl's later commune. However, the work, I argue, points to a slippery slope of Bataillean heterogeneity in that it can appear as opposition and transgression against the dominant order (homogeneity), while ultimately only serving to maintain homogeneity’s hegemony (Muehl’s unleashing of the “M” for example is a destructive impulse which insures that he “remain meek and mild”). The violence implied by Muehl’s material actions is rather aimed at unveiling the repressive violence perpetrated by reason and capital, with the antidote being uninhibited explorations of depravity and materiality through use of the body. Instead of a Wagnerian drive towards the reparation of social ties through aesthetic reception, Muehl seeks to expose the wounds created by the existing social order. Thus, replacing the utopianism of the Beethoven Frieze, we have the nihilism of Kokoschka and the anarchist spirit of Sade. In his text The Intreme, released on the occasion of the Festival for

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373 Morin, Jean-Luc Nancy, 81.

374 Ibid., 3.

375 Bataille argues that certain forms of heterogeneity, while embodying the opposite of the homogenous order’s values, only operates to maintain it. For example, police violence and fascism. Muehl’s work here embodies the slippery slope which transgressive and resistant action occupies and illustrates the reasons behind the harsh dismissal of the work as fascistic.

Psycho-physical Naturalism (1963), Muehl expresses his disdain for the civilized world and its art as well as his desire to defile it with violent orgiastic pleasure. It mirrors Bataille’s theory on human nature and the need for non-productive expenditure in the face of oppressive social norms. Bataille saw the political manifestation of such a drive in fascism in the 1930s, which was in opposition to established norms and thus, for better or worse, had the potential to serve as an agent of change. He also saw it in the production of art that resisted the commercial market. Muehl’s work speaks to both these parameters, while the violent transgression of his texts and actions which speak to destruction and debasement as a means of cleansing society of its ills might lead one to see his aesthetic as erring dangerously close to being fascistic in nature.377

Nitsch: Affect and Abreaction

histrionic means will be harnessed to gain access to the profoundest and holiest symbols through blasphemy and desecration. blasphemous provocation is tantamount to worship. it is a question of attaining and anthropological view of existence in which grail and phallus are two mutually dependant extremes....the sacrifice (abreaction) must be seen as the concern for ecstasy and the zest for life. sacrifice is another inverted form of lust...sexual energies are transmuted and translated into the cruelty of the sacrificial act. i affirm the absolute exultation of existence, whose prior requirement is the experience of the cross. the feast of the resurrection is reached by living to the full...given the outlay of experience required, existentially perceived art depends on religious

377 As previously mentioned Bataille believed that the heterogenous, in it exteriority, functioned to maintain the homogeneity of the existing order of things. Nazism in this way, maintained the status quo by making the parameters of the existing order clear. In this way, while Actionism sought to be an agent of change, it did, in a way, only keep the established order on life support. Not only through its heterogeneity but, due to their position as white european men and thus holding the most privileged position of inclusion in an order based on exclusion in service of accumulation. By springing from the same strain as that which they resist, their occupy both a position from within and from without.
sacrifice and abreactive events. however ‘sacrifice’ is spiritualized by art in an unbloody, symbolic, abstract way... (the sacrifice loses its moral significance so that a deliberately conceived abreaction occurs.)...

the warmth of life, the organic growth within the womb, the extremes of sexual intensity and mysticism, the process of existence in its totality, must be grasped at their core and rendered visible. this almost perverse ecstasy of our feelings put our minds in a state where tensions are released —a state which prior to its discovery, was primarily abreacted in mythical excess situations and sado-masochistic paradoxes (such as the cross, the rending of dionysus, his castration, the blinding of oedipus, the totemic meal).


The O.M. Theatre Manifesto of 1962, which accompanied Die Blutorgel, the action which Nitsch refers to as the conceptual birth of Actionism, mapped out the direction Nitsch’s future work would take. The intentions behind what would become his life long oeuvre were to present, in the form of an event, the entire “history of mankind”, “not its outward history with its wars, struggles for power and regicide, but its true historical or dramatic process: the development of our (mankind’s) psyche and consciousness.”

His text folds the redemptive potential of the Cross with the orgiastic excess of the Greek ritual and myth which preceded it, positing the sacrificial act as a form of sexual union with nature and these, activated within transgressive painting actions which included the desecration of lamb carcasses, the smearing of bodies and surfaces with fluids as well as mock crucifixions. In other words, Nitsch was not interested in representational strategies, but rather in transcending mere representation of political and economic historical development to explore the consequence of those developments on being and affect.

To do this, Nitsch employs the visual

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378 Nitsch as quoted in Green, Writings of the Vienna Actionists, 129.

379 Everything from blood to the liquids emanating from offal, as well as dye, vinegar, rose water and tea.

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language and rhetoric of the Dionysian myth, Christian ritual and Wagnerian aesthetic experience while expressing a desire to free man from the bonds of politicized collective experience to arrive at “a new form of existence heightened to the (intoxication) mysticism of being.”

Ironically, and true to a libidinal economy of repetition, in seeking to liberate man from various external apparatus’ of power which have been imposed on him, Nitsch establishes one anew by repeating the linguistic and visual paradigms of the old. This illustrates further what has become a future-historical impasse. However, even while employing the symbolism and language of Western history, demonstrating the impossibility of its abolishment and thus *hamartia*’s cyclical guarantee, their decontextualization is framed in a manner to transgressively expose their mass historical and psychical impact so that their oppressive nature, through abreactive release, may be diffused.

The work’s transgressive visual language borrowed from communitarian rites and rhetoric intrinsic to the cultural, political and discursive development of the West (a development which mapped the slow withering of the significance of materiality to subjectivity), as well as the work’s sacrificial and redemptive character and inclusion of organic elements, I argue, aspires to enable an encounter with a shared material reality, a moment of intimate communication with an alienated collective bodiliness. His inspiration stemmed from the epic Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* which, again, was intended to facilitate a mode of empa-

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381 Abreaction is a term used by Nitsch and coined by Sigmund Freud to describe the purpose of the O.M.T. project. It is a psychoanalytical term meaning a process in which repressed feelings are expressed and therefore released and this, through the reliving of the experience which caused the trauma and repression.

thetic aesthetic reception capable of healing fractured social ties as well as monumental altar-pieces meant to encourage a form of affective piety in the viewer, suggest a concern with the collective attainment of a new, though fundamentally nostalgic and utopian, “sensibility” and the creation of what Marcuse calls an “aesthetic ethos.” By this Marcuse points to a suturing of Enlightenment’s various dualisms and the rise of an aesthetic sensibility where “aesthetic, in its dual connotation of pertaining to the senses and pertaining to art, may serve to designate the quality of the productive-creative process in an environment of freedom” and where “technique assuming the features of art, would translate subjective sensibility into objective form, into reality.” This is where the redemptive character of Nitsch’s work and Marcuse’s thought converge, where this new reality would be one where mankind would be alleviated from an inherited guilt, hamartia, and free itself from the curse of recursion.

As referred to earlier, the work also presents a nostalgia for a moment preceding the modern pursuit of reason, mechanical productivity and accumulation, and before myth had

383 Affective piety was a mode of religious practice that was very popular in the later Middle Ages and which encouraged the production of images. These images would help the viewer attain a level of empathetic, affective and embodied understanding of Christ’s pain. As a consequence, religious imagery mean for private devotion became more and more violent and bloodied especially in the Northern/Germanic context.


386 Marcuse’s thoughts on guilt from An Essay on Liberation deserve to be quoted in full: “This would be the sensibility of men and women who do not have to be ashamed of themselves anymore because they have overcome their sense of guilt: they have learned not to identify themselves with the false fathers who have built and tolerated and forgotten the Auschwitzs and Vietnams of history, the torture chambers of all the secular and ecclesiastical inquisitions and interrogations, the ghettos and the monumental temples of the corporations, and who have worshiped the higher culture of this reality. If and when men and women act and think free from this identification, they will have broken the chains which linked the fathers and the sons from generation to generation. They will not have redeemed the crimes against humanity, but they will have become free to stop them and to prevent their recommencement” (24-25).
been co-opted by the project of nationhood and ethnic purity. This, coupled with the formal qualities of Nitsch’s work, I argue, conveys a desire for a Bataillean unproductive expenditure, that is, expenditure removed from the discourse of work. Through the “encounters with horror, violence, disgust, sexual transgression, communal witnessing of death” or experiences which cannot be captured by language, an arbitrary system of signs emptying these experiences of truth or affect, the experience of these actions would free the subject from an existence described as project or devoted to production and accumulation.\(^{387}\) It is here that the French and German discursive obsessions with the suturing of social separation converge; in Bataille’s inner-experience which translates to a “mysticism without God”\(^ {388}\) and the revolutionary potential of affect, and in Marcuse’s new sensibility as praxis from which would spring an aesthetic ethos, thus freeing production from the grips of the market. Each presents an articulation of affective experience which is both fundamentally aesthetic (an aesthetics of heterogeneity or anti-aesthetic in the case of Bataille) and Marxian, as antidote to capital and as means of depoliticizing community.

In the midst of the rise of National Socialism and at a time when rhetoric of community was increasingly bound to notions of national ethnic brotherhood galvanized into the party form, Bataille developed a complex theory of liberation, grounded in the mobilization of affect or “in the emotional bond that wells up within the masses as refusal, the atmosphere

\(^{387}\) Botting and Wilson, *Bataille Reader*, 2.

\(^{388}\) Ibid., 2.
and rage that swells like an uncontainable wave.”

Bataille’s revolution emerges from heterology, from that which cannot be captured by the dominant rhythm and discourse of productivity; in base matter, in transgression, in eroticism, in sacrifice, in that which translates to unproductive expenditure and the organic release of energies which escape accumulation.

It is in the abject and in affect, in that which exhilarates and terrifies, in what Bataille calls “inner-experience” and Nitsch names “excess experience” which force an encounter with one’s own finitude (the destabilizing of a culturally conditioned understanding of an enclosed subjectivity where one realizes that one’s “limit constitutes an opening to the outside”) that both, I would argue, envision a reparation of an individual and collective alienation from materiality. This would then facilitate the formation of an apolitical and acephalic model of community. Bataille and Nitsch share, therefore an understanding of the body as the site of refusal and revolution. It is in the wasteful expenditure of excess which resists the rhythm and discourse of productivity; in a form of radical embodiment and instance of ecstatic rupt-

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390 In the “Use-Value of D.A.F. de Sade” (1930) in Bataille Reader, Bataille says: “without a profound complicity with natural forces such a violent death, gushing blood, sudden catastrophes and the horrible cries of pain that accompany them, terrifying ruptures of what had seemed to be the immutable, the fall into stinking filth of what had been elevated - without sadistic understanding of an incontestably thundering and torrential nature, there could be no revolutionaries, there could only be a revolting utopian sentimentality.” (157).


391 Mitchell and Winfree. The Obsession of Georges Bataille. 5.

Bataille says of finitude and insufficiency that “a being that isn’t cracked isn’t possible.”

392 Ibid., 5.
ture which force a confrontation with one’s own insufficiency. \(^{393}\) This insufficiency or encounter with finitude, then provides a possibility for a completely different collective experience unbound by party politics or exchange.

Both Bataille’s affective materialism and Nitsch’s aesthetics of affect hinge on heterogeneity; on the subversive, violent, wasteful expenditure made manifest in the sacrifice, orgiastic ecstasy, and the intoxication of the ritual festival. Heterogeneity is accordingly, that which exists on the margins and obfuscates the forces of homogeneity manifest in modern bourgeois society. I locate this point of convergence between Bataille’s thought and Nitsch’s oeuvre in the rhetoric and aesthetics of sacrifice and eroticism. Nitsch juxtaposes the sacrificial nature of the Christ event and the intoxication provided by sexual encounter as a means to provoke a surge of affect. This equates to an abreactive release, made visible in the totality of the action, of that which has been suppressed within the historical development of a collective and generational trauma. The work, removed from institutional dogma, from the collectivity of the party, from the discourse of reason, from the rhetoric of nation, exists outside established understandings of collectivity, which have proven to be oppressive and enforced through authoritarian violence.

The centrality of sacrifice in Nitsch’s work in the transgressive appropriation of the Christ event and the extremes of orgiastic ecstasy, enacts a Bataillean form of refusal. In borrowing the Western model of sacrificial redemption par excellence and by removing it of its

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\(^{393}\) See Mitchell and Winfree, *The Obsession of Georges Bataille.*

“For Bataille insufficiency of individual life is not just that of a self-enclosed subject that seeks the assistance of others in order to preserve its being. Instead insufficiency is an opening to the world, a surface of contact with what is other, where one’s being spill’s out of itself. Finitude does not consist in a limit that encircles but in the fact that I cannot be so encircled, the fact that I am not an enduring totality.” (5).
institutional and moralizing context, Nitsch attempts to harness the community building potential of sacrifice. The erotic connotation given to the sacrificial/redemptive ritual in the action and in his texts renders the work all the more transgressive, while connecting the erotic to the sacrificial was to maximize the abreactive and communualizing potential of the moment of action. Furthermore, to Bataille both sacrifice and eroticism were violent instances of rupture from which inner experience, or communication which escapes language, could spring. Bataille’s moment of rupture is then the abreactive experience for Nitsch, and both are instances of wasteful and organic expenditure of energies which cannot be reified or harnessed by reason. They are moments of radical and visceral de-reification at the centre of which the non-productive body emerges as the material from which revolutionary affect emanates. Nitsch’s sacrifice “without God” is unproductive because it is removed from the context of the *ecclesia universalis* which put that violent expenditure, that death, “to work” for the building and maintenance of the Christian community. Nitsch's eroticism on the other hand, “sacred in its base adoration of the flesh,” is unproductive because it is removed from the discourse of reproduction and tied solely to orgiastic pleasure. The work thus exists in opposition to modern bourgeois society and Christian sensibility which suppress all modes of unproductive activity (non-reproductive sex, gambling, intoxication etc). Therefore, it is heterogeneous.

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394 See Georges Bataille, “Inner Experience” in *The Bataille Reader*. He says: “In sacrifice, rupture is violent, often violent in eroticism as well.” (60).

395 See Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* for more on the community of death.

Nitsch’s heterogeneity lies in its mobilization of that which is taboo and abject; its folding of the sacred Christian rite with the orgiastic pagan feast and in his use of the most base and stomach churning organic substances. Therein lies the seemingly problematic nature of the work, much like Muehl’s, in the wake of fascism which, to Bataille, was also heterogeneous in nature.

Fascism harnessed heterogeneous energies latent in homogeneous structures. Fascism elevated work, whose morality and rationale is fascism itself, to a sacred status, thereby turning servility and abjection into imagined sovereignty within a framework of capitalism dominated by a (national) corporate rather than private structure. Heterogeneity is therefore violently put to work in repairing and renewing the order of nation, state and capitalism.\textsuperscript{397}

Considering this, Nitsch’s \textit{O.M.T.} project cannot be considered fascistic in its aestheticization of violence, since his brand of heterogeneity is in opposition to the structures of capital and party. Instead violence is deployed as radical affective creativity bridging the gap between the revolutionary potential of Bataille’s heterogeneous violence and Marcuse’s understanding of the liberating potential of the sensuous. However, Nitsch’s heterogeneity and negation occupies an ambiguous position due to his appropriation of forms entrenched in cultural and historical meaning. While Nitsch’s form of heterogeneous violence transgresses the established norms of rational society, which in the form of the state holds the monopoly on violence, by appropriating the formal language of that society’s very cultural, historical and political foundations, and by occupying a normative subject position, Nitsch’s procedural vio-

\textsuperscript{397} Ibid., 27.
lence cannot dismantle homogeneity fully but rather simply exists on its margins. The same
can be said of the theoretical trajectory referenced thus far, whereby in attempting to repair
broken social ties, theory has consistently built upon, maintained dialogue with, or sought
clarity in the rhetoric and cultural production springing from an idealized origin which was
inherently exclusionary. It thus mirrors the hamartia it has attempted to thwart since the rise
of the modern bourgeois state. Transcendence of homogeneity therefore, would not simply
require a resistance against exploitative economic conditions or, as Marcuse and the Action-
ists seemed to have gleaned on the eve of 1968, occur at the level of affect. It would not sim-
ply connect to a materiality which has been dissolved into discourse in a manner affronting
the established order. Revolution would also have to expose revolutionary discourse and
praxis as “othering” and as oppressive to the bodies which are heterogeneous to its own ho-
mogeneity. Perhaps then, revolution would escape hamartia. Perhaps then revolutionary bod-
ies would neither adapt to nor uphold homogeneity by borrowing its language or occupying
its normative subject position. Rather it would expose the site of difference and the systems
of mediation which determine it, and resist the practices and discourses which have excluded
it.
THE HISTORY OF WOMAN IS THE HISTORY OF MAN... precisely because man has defined the image of woman. men create and control the social and communicative media like art and science, word and image, dress and architecture, social intercourse and the division of labour. men have reproduced their image of women within these media. they have shaped women in accordance with the patterns established by these media and women have done likewise. if reality is a social construction and men are its engineers then we are confronted by a masculine reality.

- VALIE EXPORT, Women’s Art, 1972.

The following chapter examines the work of VALIE EXPORT, proposing that her position as woman, as a body heterogeneous to the dominant order, afforded her a platform to expose and resist processes of determination inaccessible to her male comrades. Her body, as the material upon which these processes come to bear, therefore, presents itself as a potent instrument of refusal and disruption. It also proposes that her chosen aesthetic media, photographic film as well as her body, mirror, in ways similar to those seen in modernist painting, these unseen processes of determination. Firstly, they do this through the mimetic photographic capture of the intact body of the subject which appears as a trace on gelatine, a process which aesthetically reflects the increasingly veiled conditions of alienation and estrangement, as well as the social fragmentation it engenders decried by figures such as Debord and Marcuse in the 1960s. This chapter also examines her actions in relation to specific social and cultural processes which have contributed to an alienation, beyond that experienced under capital, that is specifically “othering” due to the female body’s location on the margins of history and politics, that is, included (as object) by virtue of its exclusion (as sub-
ject). Thus, the mediation and determination of the body will be excavated in a manner which exposes a crucial element of *hamartia* and by extension, social separation; the female body’s construction by a masculinist history in a manner which legitimized its exclusion from participation in public political life on the one hand, and harnessed its reproductive and sexual capacity on the other thus putting it to work for a male dominated society. EXPORT’s work addresses “the body as bearer of cultural signs and as material surface of cultural inscription”\(^{399}\) and demands whether or not it is possible, especially for woman, to escape external definition.

**Semiotics and Self-Reclamation**

The quote from VALIE EXPORT’s manifesto which opened this chapter expresses the ubiquity of processes of determination as well as their role in the production and proliferation of an androcentric construction and consumption of woman. In the text, she clearly genders both history and culture as male, thus arguing that while reality is a social construc-


I will be borrowing from Agamben’s *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, in which he discusses the Ancient Roman figure of *Homo Sacer*, he who is reduced to bare life by existing outside the law and whose death cannot be considered murder or sacrifice. Being forcibly removed from the confines of juridical order which define the political community, *Homo Sacer* is excluded from political life yet included by virtue of that exclusion. What I mean to propose is that while this process of exclusion and marginalization has always existed in society (as Levi-Strauss suggests) it has been enforced by law or voluntary as part of an institutional belonging (religious for example). It is my suggestion that the exclusion experienced by women (who were considered bare life or *zoe*) is similar but veiled by the phenomena of “love” (whether for the male whom she depends on, the father who trades her or the children she is forced to bear) which makes the state of exclusion suffered by women unseen and particularly damaging to both body and psyche. Women have undergo this process because they have always been reduced to their biology, so addressing that biology as the site of determination is crucial to emancipation.

tion, every part of that construction operates within a male epistemological and ontological framework. This necessarily implies that woman, forced to exist within that framework, has been constructed as an object for man. By the 1960s this mediation of woman, her sexual objectification and the expectation of her domestic service, was made abundantly visible within the context of mass media, film and the consumer culture boom. Images, through film and advertising, were deployed to perpetuate, package and sell, a construction of woman as purveyor of reproductive labour (domestic and sexual). A position which over the course of generations women had by and large adopted and as a result, ensured their participation in their own exploitation.\footnote{See Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann eds. Cold War Kitchen: Americanization, Technology and European Users, eds. (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press 2008) and Gro Hagemann, “Housewife and Citizen? Gender Politics in the Postwar Era” in Twentieth Century Housewives: Meanings and Implications of Unpaid Work. Gro Hagemann and Hege Roll-Hansen eds (Oslo, NW: Fagbokforlaget 2005). The image of the American 1950s housewife was also an element of political propaganda. During the Cold War, resisting that role implied communist leanings.} VALIE EXPORT, as feminist actionist, employed her body along with film and photography, media not historically coded as male within art practice, to make visible and resist a history of female subjugation. She did this hoping to “liberate culture from masculine values.”\footnote{VALIE EXPORT “Women’s Art” (1972) in Art and Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas. ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood.(Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 927-929.} Unlike her male counterparts whose actions were in dialogue with painting, its history and its limitations, EXPORT retreated from the traditional means used to
represent women in art, and towards new media as a way to forge new systems of meaning and contribute to women's self-determination through art practice.  

EXPORT’s intention was to shift the language of signification, destabilize meaning, and retrospectively change the situation of women whose voices thus far, in terms of revolutionary discourse and practice, had been largely left out of the conversation. One of the first steps EXPORT took in shifting the process of signification was to change her name. Waltraub Hollinger, née Lerner, legally changed her name to VALIE EXPORT, a name borrowed from a popular brand of cigarettes. In doing so, she resists the means of identifying and attributing meaning to a woman’s person through paternal ancestry or marital status while claiming her own identity in the process. This act of self-determination via a simple name change gains greater significance within EXPORT’s Austrian context as the Family Act, dating from 1811 and only amended in 1975, firmly divided Austrian society along gendered terms by enforcing the notion of “the father as the head of the family” and therefore

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402 While EXPORT’s manifesto deserves to be quoted in full, I will include a few quotes here for context and reference: …"women must therefore employ all media as a means of societal struggle and as a means of social progress in order to liberate culture from masculine values. they will also undertake this in art. if men have succeeded through the millennia in expressing their ideas of the erotic, of sex and beauty, their mythology of strength, virility and discipline in sculpture, paintings, novels, films, dramas, drawing etc, and thereby in influencing the consciousness of all, then the time has come AND IT IS TIME for us women to employ art as an expressive means of influencing the consciousness of everyone…to change the art imposed on us by men is to destroy the facets of woman constructed by man….the question concerning what women can give to art and art can give to women, can be answered thus: to translate the specific situation of the women into the artistic context is to construct signs and signals which, first, constitute the new artistic message and forms of expression and, second, retrospectively change the situation of women. art can be a medium of self-determination.” (Art and Theory, 928-29).

403 EXPORT, “Women’s Art,” 927-929.

404 I must stress here that the process of naming, is intimately tied to a woman’s body. In the case of the name of the father it traditionally reflects paternal ownership of her body and person until she is given in marriage. The taking of the marital name also functions as a stamp of ownership on her person and body in terms of her reproductive role within the marriage.
limiting the women’s access to the public sphere.\textsuperscript{405} With this gesture, EXPORT deploys language, an arbitrary system of signs which meditates our means of communicating, and more precisely the notion of the “proper name.” In this act of self-determination, through the rejection of the given name and by naming herself, EXPORT suspends one of the first processes by which a woman is subjugated via paternal ownership and marital status.\textsuperscript{406} The artist usurps man’s monopoly over the proper name as well as the status of object of exchange, or property, to which that name reduces her especially within a culture “based on the exchange of women.”\textsuperscript{407} This status of women as objects of trade, as commodities whose exchange solidifies, defines and determines ties among men was a point explored by feminists of the 1970s namely Gayle Rubin in \textit{The Traffic of Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex} in 1975 and later by Luce Irigaray in the 1980s. It was also an issue whose brutality was explored by EXPORT’s contemporary, Austrian writer Elfriede Jelinek in her 1975 novel \textit{Die Liebhaberinnen}. That is, in the book, the female characters participate in their own objectification, leading to their ultimate unhappiness, due to a consciousness co-opted by the “ideology of love” that blinds them to their commodity status and exploitation within a capitalist


heteropatriarchy. As Brigid Haines has argued, the book exposes Jelinek’s marxist feminism in her exposure of the harmful effect of patriarchal capitalist ideology which women internalize, doing exactly what that system requires of them, namely to legitimize themselves as women through marriage and motherhood. Considering this, women’s objectification, as commodities whose value is firmly rooted in what their body has to offer, one which appears only through the process of exchange among men, appears to have been a target at which Austrian feminist aesthetics of the postwar period were taking aim. And this, presumably due to the state’s enforcement of such conditions through legislation well into the 1970s. Instead of exposing the conditions of patriarchal ownership and the false consciousness implied by women’s submission to it through prose, EXPORT’s name change attacks the symbolic process of subjugation and valuation of her person. The gesture is a literal and figurative rejection of the Lacanian nom-du-père, which comes to acquire a very different meaning for the gendered female individual and should not be considered a universal ex-

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Also see for an in depth analysis of Jelinek’s *Die Liebhaberinnen* as well as how the book’s Marxist feminist viewpoint exposes the brutality of women’s commodity status.


411 It is worth noting that the genealogy of Austria’s modern women’s movement extends to the beginning of our *longue durée*, having begun in 1848 as part of a labour movement. See Gisela Kaplan, *Contemporary Western European Feminism*, (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2013). “The revolutionary fever of 1848 had its special variant in Habsburg capital of Vienna. At the height of the unrest the then labour minister announced that wages for women would be drastically cut and the measures would be imposed from the following day onwards. Eight thousand women workers were affected by those cuts and these prompted them into a large-scale public demonstration which, however, was dispersed by the National Guard. A few days later, a much larger…crowd demonstrated against the low wages and this time the uprising ended in a bloodbath. Out of sheer outrage against the deaths and injuries of the protestors. a new women’s organization was formed.” (131) The author is careful to point out that women were eventually forced back into their traditional roles.
perience for all subjects. Lacan uses the term *nom-du père* to designate “the factor of law and prohibition that this figure (the father) introduces into the child’s life, and to the more abstract status of paternity.” It not only refers to the entrance into language and, therefore, meaning and culture, but also the function which separates the child from the mother and establishes the father as the authority figure equated with law and social order. Lacan says: “It is in the *nom-du-père* that we must recognize the support of the Symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of law.” The implications of this statement, and of EXPORT’s resistance, are significant especially in the context of this inquiry into social separation and the collective body problem which up until now has been discussed within a historical and intellectual trajectory from which women have been given little to no agency. It suggests that not only history but meaning itself is androcentric and while subjugation is necessarily implied by the entrance into language, law and the social sphere, for women, posited as inferior to men since the beginnings of discourse, that process of subjugation is significantly more impactful. In changing her name, EXPORT attacks this particularly subjugating process of determination, one which impacts the individual body directly in terms of identity, one which precedes that experi-

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414 Both Plato and Aristotle argued that women were inferior to men and that the relationship is one of ruler to ruled.

415 I specify “body” here because for people gendered female at birth, the process of naming is tied to a history of paternal ownership and exchange in which her exchange value hinges on her body’s potential to guarantee patrilineal continuity.
enced under ideology/religion and capital thus enacting a form of resistance which her male counterparts, the Actionists, could not in a manner that would carry any great significance.

While disrupting language’s mediation of her body, EXPORT also conversely used her body as media to make visible its position as a site of social and cultural inscription. For women, this position is exacerbated due to the very association of their personhood with body and/or nature, as well as to the patriarchal and social control historically manifested in the disciplining of their bodies. In *body sign action* from 1970, EXPORT addresses the body as the material upon which cultural processes come to bear by making it the literal site of an inscription. The work consists of a garter tattooed onto her upper thigh of which she says:

> The garter is used as a sign of past enslavement, as a symbol of repressed sexuality. The garter as the sign of belonging to a class that demands conditioned behaviour becomes a reminiscence that keeps awake the problem of self determination and/or the determination by others of femininity.416

With the tattoo, she makes visible the technologies of power and control, even those as seemingly mundane as fashion, that are applied to the female body as well as the construction of femininity and propriety to which women have had to conform. EXPORT foreshadows, in practice, Foucault’s discursively constituted body where he would later state that “the body is the inscribed surface of events.”417 While the Actionists demonstrated and enacted the violence History inflicted upon the body, EXPORT exposes the body as surface. She does so by

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416 EXPORT as quoted in Mueller, *VALIE EXPORT*, 33.

making literal and visible the concealed processes of inscription and capturing it in a photographic image, making visible History’s mark and materializing its permanence.

The tattoo, a depiction of a garter clasped to the top of a stocking, references a category of dress which has played a large role in fashioning notions of femininity, with its evolution tracing shifts in women’s roles in society throughout history. Furthermore, by inscribing this sign onto her skin, the “boundary between the self and society,” renders her body the surface of a text, the material upon which history is recorded. Roswitha Mueller, in her monograph on EXPORT, draws an analogy between the vellum used in early books and the “body as a medium for communication,” arguing that the artist spatializes the body beyond its physical limits. Within the context of the 1960s and 1970s, the same analogy can be extended to film as a further spatialization of the body not only through its use as a means of representation or mass dissemination, but in the actual organic components used in the photographic process. Film, being made partly with gelatine, a protein derived from the collagen of animals, is an organic, bodily material upon which a trace is imprinted. The mechanical process performed by her chosen media, then mimics the social process of inscription while doubling the action she is performing; inscribing her body and making literal its status

418 For more see Christiana Tsaousi Consuming Underwear: Fashioning Female Identity. PhD Thesis: University of Leicester. 2011. This text also provides good reference to the history of underwear as a means to discipline women’s bodies, shape them into a desirable silhouette and facilitate the construction of gender and femininity.


420 Mueller, VALIE EXPORT, 33.
as a textual surface. The body as textual surface or surface of inscription, an analogy put forth by theorists such as Merleau-Ponty, becomes important to consider in terms of radical art practice whereby through action and through photographic capture and dissemination, the body extends beyond its physical limits and into the social, cultural and political realm in which it operates. The body can therefore be understood as mediated but also as the media upon which collective historical wounds are inflicted and by which they are publicly exposed and distributed, making it a potent material for revolutionary praxis.

Determined, Disciplined and Domesticated

In *Genital Panik*, EXPORT exposes the site of woman’s determination as bodies to be disciplined by, and defined in relation to, a superior other. She also disrupts perhaps the most ubiquitous tool in that process of disciplining; the construction of woman as object of the male gaze, one which has permeated art production since Praxiteles’ *Aphrodite of Knidos* in the fourth century BCE. That is, within the scopic regime of Western culture, woman has been discursively devised as existing for, and by virtue of, the ubiquitous male gaze. As such, she is an object of a male culture which has claimed an ownership of, or entitlement to her

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421 This also further informs the notion of expanded cinema, which I will not be addressing in this study, as a means of going beyond the parameters of the filmic medium, and expanding it through the body and space.

422 For more on the body as textual surface see Elizabeth Grosz. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana University Press. 1994. In *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, Elizabeth Grosz discusses this briefly saying: “The metaphorics of body writing posits the body, and particularly its epidermic surface, muscular-skeletal frame, blood vessels and internal organs as corporeal surfaces, the blank page on which engraving, graffiti, tattooing, or inscription can take place. This metaphor of the textualized body asserts that the body is a page or material surface, possibly even a book of inter folded leaves (one of Merleau-Ponty’s favourite metaphors) ready to receive, bear, and transmit meanings, messages, or signs, much like a system of writing.” (117).
body, and in the process robbing her of a certain agency in terms of her existence as a sub-
ject.423

In Munich in 1969, EXPORT entered an experimental movie theatre and shuffled
through the rows of seated movie goers with the crotch cut out of her pants. Individual audi-
ence members were met with her exposed genitals as she passed between them and the cine-
ema screen. EXPORT’s intention was to have the audience confront a real female body instead
of its representation on film, one which has been constructed by a male point of view and for
a male gaze. The cultural, social and technological mediation of the female body was inter-
rupted by EXPORT, even reversed; in the immediacy of her flesh, the material body becomes
the point of mediation between the spectator and the immaterial female body projected on
screen. She interrupts the male gaze and thus disrupts the culturally constructed understand-
ing of, and limitations imposed upon, the female body. While bodies are already socially and
culturally determined before their doubles are represented in any media, the female body’s
determination is exacerbated, as it is contingent upon her sexual difference in relation to the

annotations/lacansplit.htm.
Lacan in The Split Between the Eye and the Gaze, borrows from Merleau-Ponty to describe a subject
formation in relation to an internalization of the gaze. Meaning, subjectivity is “determined through
the gaze which places the subject under observation causing the subject to experience themselves as
an object being seen.” Considering the dominance of the male gaze within Western culture and the
construction of women as sexual objects in visual culture, it is reasonable to argue that a power im-
balance is enacted within the regime of the visible, one which is mirrored in art practice with the trope
of the female nude for example.
See Lacan, “The Split Between the Eye and the Gaze,” in The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psy-

220
supposed complete body and superior intellect of man.\textsuperscript{424} Furthermore, the constitutive powers that make bodies culturally intelligible, that which dictates the very process of determination, are a product of male culture which, in itself, is external to any body that differs from the white male heterosexual discursively and performatively established norm.\textsuperscript{425} The female body, as a site of difference, has been defined by a male ontological and epistemological framework in a manner which has denied her political agency or full historical presence. Indeed, EXPORT herself declared, as per the quote opening this chapter, that the “history of Woman is the history of Man.”\textsuperscript{426} While the action in the cinema was never documented, it is best known from a set of photographs taken in 1969.\textsuperscript{427} In one of the prints, EXPORT is seen sitting on an outdoor bench and wearing her \textit{aktionhose}. Her legs are spread, exposing her genitals as her uncompromising gaze meets the viewer’s straight on. Her feet are bare, her hair is teased and wild and she holds a machine gun in her hands. She presents herself as the antithesis of the acceptable female archetype of the 1950s and 1960s housewife which colo-

\textsuperscript{424} The determination of women as inferior lays at the roots of Western discourse and politics, from Aristotle who referred to woman as incomplete males, to Christian doctrine which blamed their sinful nature for the Fall of Man and to Hegel’s belief in women’s natural passivity tying her subjectivity to relations of blood and marriage. See Carla Lonzi-Revolta Femminile, \textit{Let's Spit on Hegel}, trans. Veronica Newman. (New York, NY: Secunda 2010).

\textsuperscript{425} For more on the discursive construction of bodies and gender performativity see Judith Butler, \textit{Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex}. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003). While gender and race are socially and culturally constituted as far as their determination by a set of power structures, the corporeal grounds of historical and systemic inequality demands that the material body, as site of difference, be addressed instead of being further dissolved into discourse. See C.W. Bynum, “Why All The Fuss About the Body: A Medievalist’s Perspective,” (1995).

\textsuperscript{426} VALIE EXPORT “Women’s Art,” (1972).

\textsuperscript{427} Some images show EXPORT standing instead of sitting and in one version she is also sitting on a chair and wearing shoes. The most well known version of the print is that which I focus on in this text.
nized TV screens and advertising in the postwar period: passive, submissive, smiling and well put-together. Conversely she also mimics the constructed cliché of woman as the wanton and wild body associated with unruly, unpredictable nature which man, or culture, must maintain under control.\footnote{See Sherry B. Ottner. “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?” in \textit{Woman, Culture and Society}. eds. M.Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press) 68-87. While Ottner’s text is problematic as it generalizes the association of women with nature which “every culture devalues, something that every culture defines as being of a lower order.” (72) I believe this to be a universalization which does not consider non-Western epistemologies. It does however apply to the Western context which is that discussed in this text. It is also somewhat contemporaneous with EXPORT’s work which gives an indication of the state of discourse in the 1970s.} Crucially, EXPORT exposes the very site of her biological determination and that upon which man’s fears and desires are fixated; the genitals. EXPORT unveils the site of lack which has defined woman as incomplete, the locus of male sexual desire upon which man’s anxieties have been fixated whereby the openness of her body, constantly threatening to voraciously devour or uncontrollably spill out of itself, has justified her brutal disciplining.\footnote{Here I refer to Freud’s notion of “lack” in relation to women’s anatomy which he theorized impacted their psycho sexual development and caused them to suffer from penis envy. I am also referencing the trope of the \textit{vagina dentate} and the fear of female sexuality which translates to emasculation and castration.} The name of the work, \textit{Genital Panik}, references this anxiety and communicates the disruptive potential of a confrontation with female genitals, willfully unveiled in a public and therefore, political space, unmediated and stripped of the exclusively sexual or reproductive function historically assigned to it by patriarchal and moralizing religious norms. The work at once presents the body as entirely the artist’s own, a declaration of sovereignty, while also making manifest the disruptive and culturally determined abject, heterogenous body through an act of exposure equating to non-productive expenditure — her body resisting the reproductive role masculinist society assigned to her — threatening to
capitalist accumulation and menacing to the repressive conditions of the established homogeneous order, the discussion of which closed the previous chapter.

The previous chapters, Chapter I in particular, outlined the historically contingent political, cultural and economic processes which ensnare and inscribe the body, disciplining it as a means to create the docile bodies required for capitalism’s homogeneous bio-political substructure to take hold.\textsuperscript{430} In \textit{Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life}, Giorgio Agamben expands upon Foucault’s work on biopower, whereby the living body becomes the focus of modern political strategy. Keeping its population healthy or regulating the movement of bodies deemed a potential danger to the state and its population, becomes a matter of chief political concern. Foucault speaks of biopower’s gradual bestialization of man as well as its progress to the extent that it is possible for the state to both “protect life and to authorize a holocaust.”\textsuperscript{431}

Capitalism, whose premise is based on the extraction of value from labouring bodies, through the ruse of the wage, convinced man of his freedom only to exacerbate this gradual bestialization. With capitalist accumulation becoming a matter of state concern in the nineteenth century, the turning of citizens into a compliant source of labour power and the maintenance of a healthy work force necessarily became an issue of utmost political import. Indeed, Agamben claims that “the development and triumph of capitalism would not have been


possible…without the disciplinary control achieved by the new biopower, which, through a series of appropriate technologies… created the docile bodies that it required.”\textsuperscript{432} Perhaps however, it is capitalism’s triumph over the state, reflected in its trajectory since 1848, which shifted political strategy’s emphasis on the living body, capitalizing on inherited and already established power dynamics. The Italian Marxist feminists of the 1970s, rising out of the post-fascist context and against the backdrop of Italy’s autonomist struggle, gave full voice to this very condition as it pertains to the specific form of oppression experienced by women within patriarchal culture and under capital. While women’s bodies had been put to work for centuries as guarantors of patrilineal continuity, male sexual satisfaction and domestic labour, the rise of capitalism exacerbated the determination of women’s bodies, as bodies whose natural condition is to labour and to do so without remuneration, as part of her natural destiny, an already existing heteropatriarchy. While Carla Lonzi in \textit{Let's Spit on Hegel!} spoke of capitalism’s inheritance of women’s already existing discursively constructed subordinate state, fashioned by and in relation to a male ontological absolute, Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Sylvia Federici, within the context of the \textit{Wages Against Housework} campaign in the 1970s and more recently in \textit{Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation} (2004), addressed the transition from oppression to gender-based exploitation within a capitalist system while unpacking the brutal disciplining of women’s bodies, their exclusion from the social relation of the wage, and thus their isolation within the home and privatization of their body. This discursively constructed inferiority and physical isolation, rendered her dependant on the male waged worker, enslaving her further to the couple form. While Lonzi

\textsuperscript{432} Ibid., 10.
called for women’s de-culturation through self-awareness, Dalla Costa argued for a destruction of the role of housewife, both calling for the dismantling of culturally and economically imposed constraints placed upon the gendered female body. Austria, another post-fascist context, as previously mentioned, also saw a Marxist critique of women’s subjugation in the literary works of Elfriede Jelinek. Rejecting the “feminist” label, Jelinek’s feminism is articulated through a staunch criticism of the conservative, patriarchal nature of an Austrian postwar capitalist culture infected by lingering fascism. Her feminism stems from her awareness of the objectification of women, the exploitative nature of capital and a self-critical understanding of the internalization of heteropatriarchy's violent nature and of women’s at times unwitting complicity. Her feminism is not only anti-capitalist but, crucially, antifascist. Matthias Piccolruaz Konzett elaborates:

Politically, Jelinek knows that women, as silent or cheerful bystanders during the Nazi years, contributed in their own passive fashion from within the realm of domesticity to the atrocities of the regime. Thus as an oppressed group, women are not shown as entirely exempt from political responsibility concerning racism and other discourse of exclusion. This self-critical approach can be found in her portrayal of women that display signs of masochism, internalized norms of patriarchal thought, reckless

433 See Dagmar C. G. Lorenz, “Elfriede Jelinek’s Political feminism: ‘Die Ausgesperrten’,” in *Modern Austrian Literature*, vol.23, no. 3/4 Special Issue: The Current Literary Scene in Austria (1990): 111-119. Lorenz says: “When in the 70s feminist debates tended to deal with feminist separatism, an autonomous women’s culture, women’s history and gender specificity, Jelinek demonstrated little interest in such issues isolated from the entire social system. She is rooted in the marxist feminist tradition, in the 1968 student movement. She herself experienced life in a Berlin Maoist commune and she is a member of the Austrian Communist Party.” (111).
consumerism and so forth (…) Her heroines never suffer exclusively from
patriarchy but from a complex of internalized discourses that produce
positions of oppression or self-assent to a position of oppression.434

Instead of directly targeting the material conditions of women like her Italian com-
rades, Jelinek attacks the symbolic, using it against itself; torturing language so that it may
tell the truth435 and exposing women’s experience (or internalization) of the perverse violence
hiding beneath Austria’s bourgeois morality.436 Slavoj Zizek describes her work as “uncom-
promisingly describing the violence of men against women in all its modalities, including
women’s own libidinal complicity in their victimization,” claiming that it revealed the ob-
scene fantasies concealed by Central European respectability.437 As mentioned earlier, Je-

Lamb-Faffelberger, Matthias Piccolruaz Konzett. (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University
Press, 2007), 19.

435 In her acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize (2004), Elfriede Jelinek said: “Language should be
tortured to tell the truth.” Slavoj Zizek makes reference to it in his text “My Own Private Austria,”
The Symptom 10. (Spring 2009).

436 In Elfriede Jelinek (2007), Matthias Piccolruaz Konzett says this of the Austrian context of Je-
linek’s works: “Austria may well represent a traumatic location in Jelinek’s writings, as it appears
everywhere in her work as the site of an obsessive inquiry into one’s past and one’s socialization. Je-
linek treats Austria’s unremarkable and minor appearance as that of a curious symptom, one in which
the larger extent of an illness is condensed, concealed and contained in a specific part standing in for
the whole. The country, so to speak, stands in pars pro toto for Wester European culture within its
postwar affluence and its apparently peaceful welfare state societies. The symptom thus betrays not
immediately the illness but rather its management achieved through camouflage and repression…
Jelinek’s Austria is overshadowed by the Shoah…In her close scrutiny of Austrian public, historical
and cultural discourses, Jelinek traces this great catastrophe of European cultural in its last tremors of
denial, amnesia and reactionary defines of the past.” (8-9).

For more on Jelinek’s exposure of perversion see Brenda L. Bethman, “Obscene Fantasies: Elfriede
Open Access Dissertations 86. https://scholarworks.umass.edu/open_access_dissertations/86. 
linek’s marxist feminism is perhaps most visible in *Die Liebhaberinnen* and her exposure of the impact of capitalist exploitation on the domestic sphere, whereby the man’s ability to earn a wage reproduces capitalism’s hierarchical conditions within the home, giving men greater power over women. She also demonstrates how patriarchal capitalist ideology exacerbates a pre-existing alienation from their own sexual desires and from each other, their commodity status encouraging competition with one another, a point the media and consumer culture capitalized upon.\(^{438}\)

This role as unwaged domestic worker as well as woman’s already existing sexual objectification by a male gaze in visual culture was further normalized within the postwar consumer culture boom and continued into the 1960 and 1970s.\(^{439}\) Hence, while all bodies are determined from the very moment of their entrance into language, forcing them to adapt to the disciplining norms of culture and capitalism, the female body’s mediation, as a site of difference deemed inferior and in service within history and culture, necessarily exceeds that experienced (consciously or not) by her male counterparts. Pendant to this, her alienation, whether in terms of her isolation within the domestic realm or from the (re)productive forces of her instrumentalized body, goes beyond that experienced by the male waged worker.

\(^{438}\) Haines, “Beyond Patriarchy.” 653.

\(^{439}\) The impact of consumer culture and the proliferation of images on social relations in the postwar period is impossible to dismiss. Guy Debord, for example, in the *Society of the Spectacle* decried the reifying and alienating conditions of capitalist consumer culture, a concern reprised, even in form, by Tiqqun in *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young Girl*, SEMIOTEXT(E)/Intervention Series (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012) Many advertisements from the 1950s, 60s and 70s did little to conceal their misogynist character. See M.M. Talbot, *All the World and her Husband: Women in the 20th Century Consumer Culture*, (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2000).
This inquiry, thus far, examined the Actionists’ works as resistance against conditions of alienation from body already existing within a Western ideological and intellectual framework but intensified with the firm installation of a political economy based on the extraction of value from the labouring body, leading to the reification of social relations. One of the points mentioned was the use of women in these actions in a manner which instrumentalized them, reducing them to mere bodies as opposed to individual subjects. Without denying the agency these women possessed in consenting to participate, the actions magnify or make aesthetically manifest, Woman as a “worker body” within a heteropatriarchy due to the determination of her existence in relation to, and for men. In other words, this worker function is naturalized to her body and pre-exists that determined by the wage. Under capital, it is therefore concealed precisely due to its unwaged status, lending the male waged worker exclusive claim to that worker function. Max Weber in General Economic History (1923), addresses the division of labour between the sexes and the status of women as perpetual workers responsible for both tending to the land and maintaining the household in society’s pre-dating capital. He says: “woman was a continuous worker, the man an occasional one.” With the shift from an agrarian to industrial society, man is free to sell his labour with his labour time delineated by the wage implying a beginning and end to his working day. The wage also comes to define labour as such. Women, on the other hand, excluded from the process of exchange which would signal their labour as “work” and that labour being naturalized as part of a biological and moral imperative, have seen their status as worker bodies denied. But it is precisely because of this unwaged status and the “continuous” character or her toil that I

characterize woman, gendered as such, as worker body. It is derived from woman’s condition as a body conceived as existing for, or perpetually available to facilitate and satisfy the needs of male society, making labour the condition of her existence. This, in relation to art practice, is no new suggestion. The cliché of the artist and female model within the context of modern art is one of the most visible manifestations of this condition of the female body put to work for the greater destiny of the male artist genius, a position from which women have been excluded. This trope was taken even further in the postwar period with artists such as Piero Manzoni, who signed the nude bodies of women claiming them as genuine art works (*Living Sculpture*, 1961) and Yves Klein who used their bodies as paint brushes (*Anthropometrie*, 1960). However, in the case of the Actionists, male ownership of the female sexual organs, that which EXPORT willfully reveals in *Genital Panik*, is at times overtly laid bare. More specifically, it is seen in Nitsch’s *Action 32: Seventh Abreaction Play* where the female participant’s sex is washed and opened before simulating copulation with her as she lies on a cross, Muehl’s *Leda mit dem Schwan* in which he reinterprets mythological rape, and *Material Action 3* in which he takes it upon himself to “reveal (the participant’s) vagina and anal opening.” What was fundamentally ignored by the Actionists in their exposure and reclamation of alienated materiality, which I argue lays at the source of broken social ties, is the reproduction of that very condition through the use of “body objects” in their actions. In the case of their use of women, considering millennia of exclusion and subordination (a condi-

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441 I am not suggesting that it is done so deliberately as though the purpose of the action is not to claim ownership over the female body. The actions simply echo the conditions of women’s bodies within male History and especially under capital.

tion made considerably visible in the history of art) due to sexual difference, there exists an additional layer of alienation which went ignored by the Actionists to which, as previously mentioned, by the late 1960s and 1970s, feminist groups were drawing more and more attention.⁴⁴³

As previously argued, in *Genital Panik*, EXPORT unveils the part of her material body which has caused her to be determined and essentialized as a “worker body” for and within a male dominated social, cultural and political order. As pointed out by Roswitha Mueller, the association of Woman with body was a crucial part of feminist reclamation of the body during the second wave feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. She says: “The special appropriation of body work for feminism must be seen in the equation of woman and body, which is as old as patriarchal society itself.”⁴⁴⁴ Indeed, to be born biologically female is to come up against a debasing intellectual history that has made its way into the collective unconscious. Lisa Vollendorf summarizes it best in her text on feminism in the Early Modern period stating:

> The intellectual history of the West is brimming with seemingly endless metaphors that claim to capture Woman’s essence. According to Aristotle, woman is an impotent, deficient man. To Freud and Lacan, she is lack; to Derrida, intangible truth. Some of these associations are familiar to us in even

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⁴⁴³ The Wages for Housework campaign, for example, which started in Italy and grew to be an international movement.

broader terms: woman as nature in opposition to man’s culture; woman as body and man as head.\(^{445}\)

While the cultural constructed-ness of bodies has been a topic of considerable interest in the past twenty years, Judith Butler’s work especially comes to mind, contributing greatly to gender and queer studies, the concern remains, in terms of women’s historically contingent determination and subordination as worker bodies due to their genitalia and reproductive system, that this approach may further dissolve the material body into discourse.\(^{446}\) Judith Butler in *Bodies that Matter*, argues that:

*The regulatory norms of “sex” work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies and, more specifically, to materialize the body’s sex, to materialize sexual difference in service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative. In this sense what constitutes the fixity of the body, its contours, its movement, will be fully material but materiality will be rethought as the effect of power.*\(^{447}\)

In short, while she does not deny the reality of biology and anatomy, to Butler, sex and race are social and cultural constructions. They come into being through a set of regulatory norms and systems of signs that are adopted or adapted to over time. Those regulatory norms are not simply an external pressure applied to the subject but constitutive of the subject itself. So


\(^{446}\) See C.W. Bynum, “Why All the Fuss About the Body?”(1995).

“matter” is discursively produced and it is precisely in relation to those norms which construct it that it is determined to “matter” or not. While gender and race are socially and culturally constituted as far as their determination by a set of power structures, the categories which those structures delineate are nevertheless “real” in terms of embodiment. They are projected upon the physical body in which one is born. The history and lived experience of oppression based on race or gender is thus reason enough not to dismiss the material body in any theorization of subjectivity. Additionally, above and beyond the experience of alienation tackled in this study, bodies which do not fit the parameters of the ideal body upon which humanist discourse was founded (white and male), inhabit a heightened state of fragmentation due to their existence within a system and a history which marginalizes them. Furthermore, while Western intellectual history has subordinated the body to the superiority of the mind, that condition, dictated by cogito ergo sum, has been reserved for the white male body. Conversely, the opposite has been the case for those born outside those normative physical parameters; the judgment of their worth and personhood has been based on the material body with which they were born; their skin colour and/or genitalia serving as an indication of their intellectual capacity and inherent morality. In this case the body has been construed as having precedence over the mind and as being a direct reflection of legal personhood or citizenship. For bodies that have historically (and presently) been deemed inferior to the norma-

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448 Butler, in Bodies that Matter says: “to be material means to materialize [that is, to articulate], where the principle of that materialization is precisely what “matters” about that body, its very [cultural] intelligibility. In this sense, to know the significance of something is to know how and why it matters, where ‘to matter’ means at once ‘to materialize’ and ‘to mean.’” (32).

449 Anthropometry, an instrument of colonial oppression, is an example of such scientific discourse which attempted to prove the intellectual and moral inferiority of the “other” in relation to their physical body.
tive body, placed in a subordinate position and made vulnerable to real and/or juridical violence,\(^{450}\) the denial of the significance of a material body (whose subordination is determined even before entrance into the Symbolic order, before adopting society’s laws and rules of conduct) amounts to an abolition of History and dismissal of oppression. While Butler’s argument does expose the symbolic systems of mediation that govern and determine our bodies and persons from the moment we enter into language, by negating a primordial materiality, it does little to dismantle them. Instead of dismantling the system of signification which mediates us, the argument defers the body further into a realm of unknowing and insignificance. In its remediation, it mediates anew. This, however, presents the impasse. The very impasse presented by the entrance into language and which perpetuates the libidinal drive towards repetition. That is, the impossibility of going back to the pre-Symbolic order, the impossibility of existing outside of or beyond the system of signification which governs our society, as well as the impossibility of expunging the history which created it. In terms of what this means for the category of woman (gendered as such), regardless of one’s gender identification or sexual orientation, to be born with female genitalia means being born into a position of subordination within the relations of (re)production which have historically (and continue to especially in developing countries) made women dependant on men. To ignore that would be tantamount to re-inscribing a discourse of disembodiment which had left the theorization

\(^{450}\) I need only refer to the issues being raised by the Black Lives Matter movement and to the fact women are overwhelmingly the victims of sexual assault compared to men while men represent the highest percentage of assailants. According to EU statistics “Most victims of sexual violence (85.8 %) are female, whereas most suspects (96.5 %) and offenders (98.3 % of convicted persons) are male.” Eurostat, “Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics, Last revised May 2017, Accessed November, 2017. http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Crime_and_criminal_justice_statistics#Sexual_violence.
of being and of subjectivity up to men who have excluded women from consideration. I understand this condition to be mirrored by the Actionists’ works in the 1960s. While they do draw attention to the body by asserting its materiality at a moment when historically and aesthetically its erosion was being keenly felt, that body occupies a position of privilege, a position magnified, again, by the occasional subordinate role played by female participants. This condition however is veiled, much like hamartia. In attempting to bring about revolutionary change, the unique position of women face a l’histoire, and thus their marginalization, is overlooked because the female body points to a form of labour, a way of existing in the world, understood within collective consciousness to be a natural obligation. That worker function is decided before she even enters into language or can ‘perform’ the normative behaviours imposed upon her and which define passive femininity. While culture and social dynamics do much to materialize the body as Butler suggests, the material body pre-exists the norms which dictate it and as such can be a potent ground for resistance and refusal. The female body which resists that worker function understood as natural through alternative gender identification, sexual orientation, sex work or resisting the couple form, implies a worker body which is refusing to adopt and perform the regulatory norms of sex or the unwaged labour (sexual or reproductive) it is expected to perform for men within a capitalist mode of production.
Woman as Worker Body: Discipline, Abjection and Heterogeneity

*Production is the basis of social homogeneity. Homogeneous society is productive society, namely useful society. Every useless element is excluded, not from all of society, but from its homogeneous part.*


EXPORT, at the opening of this chapter was quoted as saying that History is male. Excluded from political life and intellectual discourse, pushed to the margins of history due to a biological determinism which qualified her as inferior, woman was assimilated into a male society on the basis of their reproductive functions. That is, based on the tasks her body was to “naturally” perform for the advancement of a male agenda, both on a micro and macro level. This, even more so with the rise of capital when their reproductive and sexual capacity was put to work, without wage, to provide capital with labour power and to reproduce the male worker. The female body is subsequently a body which has had to be disciplined. Constructed as disruptive and morally corrupt within Christian epistemology due to a supposed voracious sexual appetite, and deemed intellectually inferior and irrational since the dawn of Western intellectual discourse, various technologies were deployed to render her non-productive and potentially disruptive body into one naturally destined to work.451

Returning to the discussion of Bataille’s heterology from the previous chapter, I argue, that woman, occupying a subject position constructed as fixed to her materiality hence, causing her exclusion from political life, appears as heterogeneous to the established order due to the determination of her body as site of difference, rendering her “other.” It is by har-

451 For more on the disciplining measures imposed upon the female body within the course of history and the rise of capitalism see Sylvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch, Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2004.)
nessing that constructed heterogeneity and with the full deployment of her “unproductive” flesh, that a radical potential may be located. In denying the disciplining norms historically imposed upon her and refusing the labour to which her body has been assigned by a homogeneous order (thus making labour her ontic condition), the female body refuses to be “productive” and thus strikes against the homogeneity of bourgeois culture. In doing so, she enacts her own form of procedural violence towards a system which heavily relies on the compliance of both her body and consciousness to its sphere of knowledge and praxis. This disruptive heterology however, properly contained through systemic disciplining measures, instead of disrupting said social order, has been made to support it.\textsuperscript{452} In \textit{Genital Panik}, EXPORT sheds the worker function through her specific act of exposure. Her unveiling of her genitals is removed from any relation to male ownership or rather her body is quite literally stripped of the meaning and function attributed to it: to labour, whether in terms of biological reproduction, being an object for the male gaze or provider of sexual satisfaction. As such, it is an assertion of materiality equating to non-productive expenditure which in itself is threatening to the capitalist system, which by the time of her radical unveiling, had reached a point of crisis.\textsuperscript{453} EXPORT deploys the site of her heterogeneity, while also ridding herself of the cul-

\textsuperscript{452} The modern position of the housewife serves as an example of this condition whereby the heterogeneous body has been put to work and disciplined to support the dominant order. An invention of the capitalist era, her work being to physically, sexually and emotionally support the male counterpart through unpaid labour naturalized to her biology, the housewife greatly contributes to the maintenance and growth of capitalist accumulation.

\textsuperscript{453} It is worth considering that one of the issues of concern among students in France in the early days of May ’68 and for feminists at the time was greater sexual freedom. Students wanted the rights to co-ed visitations in dorm rooms and women wanted greater reproductive freedom (birth control and abortion). Considering the ensuing anti-capitalist struggle, especially in France, it can be argue that non-reproductive sex is deemed a threat to capitalism’s foundations. The same argument can be applied to the resistance western governments have historically shown towards gay rights and legal sex work.
tural assimilation in the form of the passive nude or the dutiful housewife, which rendered that heterogeneity supportive of the dominant order.

In bodily terms, to Bataille, that which is heterogeneous was excretions, or the abject. Woman’s discursively constructed heterogeneity is also bodily. That is, within a Western cultural unconscious of which Christianity is a crucial factor, it has been understood as a cast-off of the male body. In an illumination from the twelfth century manuscript called the Stammheim Missal depicting the seven days of creation from the Book of Genesis, the central register of the composition is reserved for God’s most important creation, Man. However the focus is placed on the birth of Eve. Adam lies naked and sleeping while Eve’s torso juts out from between two of his ribs. The only indication of divine act of creation is God’s arm appearing on the left side of the register. The iconography is consistent in countless depictions of the creation of woman in many mediums from the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. Woman, therefore, within a masculinist Christian understanding, is the abject. She is the cast-off of man’s body and heterogeneous to him. She is difference, disruption and moral corruption, supported ideologically by her temptation of Adam which ultimately led to the “fall of man.”

In her essay Approaching Abjection, philosopher and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva defines the abject as that which disrupts the boundaries between subject and object and, she argues, is an important stage in the formation of the subject within the Symbolic order. In bodily terms, the abject is the “I” that is not I, it is the “I” that is excreted and which serves as
a reminder of the ambiguous and fragile nature of the body’s limits.\textsuperscript{454} As a confrontation with corporeality, it serves as a reminder of our finite nature which also amounts to a potentially disruptive encounter with the reality of our complete lack of control over the body’s somatic processes, drives and inevitable death. Kristeva says: “Such waste drops so that I may live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit — cadere, cadaver.”\textsuperscript{455} Kristeva discusses this in terms of subject formation whereby the body of the mother must be rejected in order to adopt the nom-du-père.\textsuperscript{456} Meaning that, to Kristeva, “abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be”\textsuperscript{457} thus accounting for abjection’s traumatic potential. The abject can also be applied to certain social disruptions. It is that which bursts forth and threatens order and the systems in place such as Nazism and Auschwitz which she names in her text as evils erupting in a manner which forces us to recognize the fragility of the boundaries set up by law and order.\textsuperscript{458} Bataille’s heterology can be regarded as having similar qualities, considering his analysis on the psychological structure of fascism. In terms of how this applies to women and to my previous discussion of the origins of women within a Christian episteme, one which has in-


\textsuperscript{455} Kristeva, “Approaching Abjection,” 3.

\textsuperscript{456} I would like to remind the reader that for Lacan the “Name of the Father” equates to the entrances into language. He equates it to the identification with the father (language/law/history) and thus the rejection of the mother (nature) with the entrance into the Symbolic order.

\textsuperscript{457} Kristeva, “Approaching Abjection”, 10.

\textsuperscript{458} Kristeva, “Approaching Abjection,” 4.
evitably contributed to the formation of twentieth century Western social, cultural and political norms, arguably oriented by and in favour of male subjects,\(^{459}\) is that Woman, as the abject inspires anxiety and fear, provokes a breakdown in meaning due to a collapse of the distinction between the male “whole” subject and the female “other.” Again, Kristeva claims that abjection is

an extremely strong feeling which is at once somatic and symbolic, and which is above all a revolt of the person against an external menace from which one wants to keep oneself at a distance, but of which one not only has the impression that it is an external menace but that it may menace us from the inside.\(^{460}\)

The abject attracts just as it repels. I am not suggesting that the determination of woman as abject and her subsequent disruptive potential is part of individual subject formation in the manner which Kristeva theorizes the abject in term of the relationship to the mother. I am

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\(^{459}\) See Ann Rosalind Jones, “Julia Kristeva on Femininity: The Limits of a Semiotic Politics,” *Feminist Review*. No. 18. Cultural Politics. Palgrave Macmillan Journals. (Winter, 1984): 56-73. [http://www.jstor.org/stable/1394859](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1394859). Jones refers to Kristeva, in *La Revolution du Language Poetic* (1974). Kristeva says, regarding the passage into culture as a passage into patriarchal society and its language, which once adopted, serves to uphold its structure: “The symbolic order functions in our monotheistic West by means of a system of kinship dependant upon transmission of the father’s name and a rigorous prohibition of incest and a system of verbal communication that is increasingly logical, simple, positive, and stripped of stylistic, rhythmic, poetic ambiguities. Such an order brings this constitution—al inhibition of the speaking animal to a zenith never before attained, which is assumed by the role of the father. The mother’s share, (the repressed) in such an order includes not only the impulses (of which the most basic is the impulse of aggressive rejection) but the earliest training of those impulses….which is marked by rhythms, intonations, and gestures which as yet have no significance.” (58) This is this significant to this inquiry and to this chapter as it points to the argument that culture, being ruled by the paternal law, is male. Its language, its discursive practices (re-examined over and over since 500BC) and its politics are male. Considering the problem recursive history, a break in the cycle of revolution and restoration would perhaps demand a full rejection of said culture without of course the abolition of History.

suggesting however that on a larger cultural and social scale, when it comes to the formation of a Christian worldview qua collective understanding of gender and gender relations as well as capitalism’s inheritance of that paradigm and moral stance,\textsuperscript{461} woman is the abject to man as well as to the established order created by and for him. The biologically female body, construed as the cast-off of the male body, is that menace from “inside” of which Kristeva speaks. It is that which stirs the drives and threatens man’s capacity for rational or moral self-control.\textsuperscript{462} Hence, the vested interest in the disciplining of her body via social or juridical means. These historical and cultural processes which have disciplined women’s bodies are precisely those which the Italian Marxist feminists of the 1970s were addressing and attempting to resist, thus picking up, in terms of praxis, where French feminism’s theorization on the processes of inscription, both cultural and psychological, left off.\textsuperscript{463} While both veins may seem incompatible, each were fundamentally concerned with the body: in relation to the symbolic structure of the self in relation to the female body constructed as “other,” on the one hand, and in relation to a historical materialist unpacking of women’s oppression on the oth-

\textsuperscript{461} I am again referring here to capitalism’s inheritance of, and even benefit from Christianity’s debasement of women whether ideologically or in practice (the witch hunts for example as well as the moralizing control over women’s reproductive capacity). I can also direct the reader to the earlier discussion regarding the connection between guilt and debt in the gradual transfer to a capitalist political economy.

\textsuperscript{462} During Middle Ages, a crucial period to consider because it represents the Christianization of the Western world, the naked female body was reserved for Eve and Luxuria. While Eve’s stood for the fall of Man, Luxuria was the personification of Lust and of women who bore no children. The female body unveiled, therefore, stood as something detrimental to the spiritual and therefore actual health of the community by having brought sin to the world and by wontedly tempting men with their open, lustful bodies.

\textsuperscript{463} I am referring to French feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir as well as figures such as Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva.
er. Together, they form a feminist discursive framework composed of a dialectical pull between interiority and exteriority, with flesh acting as the boundary between the two.

As previously mentioned, the abject is also something to which we are paradoxically drawn to or from which a sort of *jouissance* is derived.\textsuperscript{464} However, *Jouissance* however does not denote pure pleasure per se. Instead of pure enjoyment that fits neatly within the parameters of social norms, *jouissance* lies beyond the pleasure principle, disrupts the ego, and threatens the established order of things. Lacan speaks of *jouissance* as an excess of life which “begins with a tickle and ends with a blaze of petrol.”\textsuperscript{465} A concept which he borrowed from Freud, he uses the Aristotelean term *ouïsa* to define what *jouissance* is: intrinsically connected to being in terms of embodiment.\textsuperscript{466} The double-edged sword of the abject, as that which attracts and repels, reflects this notion of *jouissance*. The same can be said of female genitalia, in its cultural construction as both *l’origine du monde*\textsuperscript{467} and *vagina dentata*. EX-PORT unveils her genitalia in a manner which reflects its threatening capacity not only to the

\textsuperscript{464} Kristeva says: “One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it [*on en jouie*]. Violently and painfully. A passion.” As quoted by Marla Carlson, *Performing Bodies in Pain: Medieval and Post-Modern Martyrs, Mystics and Artists* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 133. Carlson relates the “self-shattering pleasure of jouissance” to the abject.


\textsuperscript{467} I am making reference to Gustave Courbet’s famous painting of the same name depicting a woman’s genitals.
male psyche, but also to a culture which has put it to work as sexual object or reproducer of
the labour force.

*Jouissance*, for Kristeva, occurs on the level of the semiotic, a pre-Symbolic stage
before the child’s entrance into language though never completely left behind after accultura-
tion.\(^{468}\) It is the threat of the Real, of materiality, of pure primordial need which disrupts the
comfortable confines of structure and order adopted with the *nom-du-père*. Considering *Gen-
ital Panik* in conjunction with EXPORT’s literal shunning of her father’s name, I view her act
of exposure, the unveiling of the most closely guarded and feared part of female anatomy,
that which is associated with primordial origin, primal pleasure, and which imposes a con-
frontation with the finite materiality of existence and therefore, with death from a psychoana-
lytical viewpoint, to function as both an embodied stance against the Symbolic order and an
act of refusal directed against the patriarchal culture it stands for. Kristeva, in the 1970s
deemed the Symbolic order to be inherently patriarchal and as a consequence, exclusionary
in nature, a point which I argue to be a key component of a specific form of alienation expe-
rienced by women. In her text *Julia Kristeva on Femininity: The Limits of a Semiotic Politics*
Ann Rosalind Jones states:

Kristeva goes on to associate the Symbolic with the various discourse which
organize public life: religion, economics, tribal and national groupings, law,
politics, metaphysics; and she aligns the dominant logic and the power base of
each social level with paternity, with masculinity. The Symbolic order is a
man’s world: it dominates the primary pleasures of the body and the senses,

\(^{468}\) For more see Ann Rosalind Jones, “Julia Kristeva on Femininity” (1984).
suppresses non-reproductive sexuality and any physical and psychic expenditure not aimed at profit and accumulation. Kristeva, that is, identifies the Symbolic with patriarchy, understood as the totality of culture.\textsuperscript{469}

In \textit{Genital Panik}, the exposed female genitalia removed from the confines of domesticity or male authority which put it to work for reproductive purposes, and thus the refusal of its worker function, corresponds to the threat of pure expenditure. It is a strike against capital and against the unwaged worker function that capital has assigned to the female body. Furthermore, the assertion of its pure materiality, a materiality given meaning through discourse, that is, constructed as an unruly and natural menace, has the potential to disturb the homogeneous realm of the thinking Cartesian subject.\textsuperscript{470}

The disruptive and even terrifying quality of female nudity and its perceived voracious, threatening sexual capacity is a theme often given voice in modern painting.\textsuperscript{471} Picasso’s \textit{Les Demoiselles D’Avignon} from 1907 is perhaps the most notable modernist example. The painting is a stark contrast from the archetype of the passive female nude who bears little threat in terms of emasculating her male observer. Picasso famously shattered pictorial convention with the painting’s proto-cubist style, a formal violence inflicted on the female nude, together with the inescapable stares of the five towering naked prostitutes. Here, male sexual

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Jones, “Julia Kristeva on Femininity,” 58.
\item See Amelia Jones. \textit{Body Art: Performing the Subject} (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 1. Amelia Jones speaks of the intersubjective exchange implied by body art as a performative practice to precipitate the de-centring the Cartesian subject of modernism.
\item While I am not suggesting that EXPORT’s \textit{Genital Panik} is a performance or confrontation with female sexuality, but rather a display of the female genitalia “not” in service to a male cultural or sexual agenda or expectations, I do understand it however to that it nevertheless poses a threat to a patriarchal culture.
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anxiety is projected onto the threatening sexual predation of the female sex worker, an archetype of modernity, and visually translated through sharp lines and a fragmented picture plane. Leo Steinberg experienced the picture as a “tidal wave of female aggression…an onslaught” while Robert Rosenberg denounced the “five nudes (who) force their eroticized flesh upon us with a primal attack.” Female sexuality, communicated through the unapologetically exposed naked body and the uncompromising gaze, is viewed as threatening and primal. One can read in “primal” the connotation of primitive, wild and “close to nature,” the antithesis of the rational ordered world of culture and language often associated with the female body. Picasso made this connection formally overt by rendering the faces of the women in the painting like African masks and Iberian heads. EXPORT, flying in the face of misogynist conjecture, plays up the trope of woman qua nature by teasing her hair wildly, mirroring the natural texture of the pubic hair covering the locus of desire and dread. EXPORT exploits the confrontation with the site of castration, the commingling of terror and attraction stirred up by the female body, construed as threatening within culture and discourse, and made formally manifest in Picasso’s painting and later works such as De Kooning’s *Woman I* (1950).

EXPORT, at once harnesses this anxiety projected onto the female body while resisting sexual objectification. Her act of procedural violence lies in the gesture of the cut, in the excision of fabric which conceals and disciplines. By willfully and uncompromisingly exposing the

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473 I am referring here to Freud’s theories of castration anxiety. I also refer the reader to Barbara Creed’s *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993) in which she turn’s Freud’s misogynist theories regarding female lack on their head by suggesting that the female genitalia instead inspires a deep fear of emasculation in the male. It is her very wholeness, physically and as a reproductive and sexual being that is disruptive to a patriarchal society.
site of her determination, in the specificity of that exposure, she at once confronts and unveils woman’s mediation by an androcentric epistemological framework which has carefully controlled her heterogeneous and disruptive body by “putting it to work” in service of said framework.

The Disruptive Potential of the Non-Labouring Female Body

Tracing the trajectory of the female nude in art does much to unravel the female body’s disciplining, politicization and construction as an object existing or “working” to fulfil a role circumscribed by male culture, and in doing so, pointing to the importance of addressing the bodily basis of subordination. Popular in genre paintings during the Early Modern period as a means to provide erotic content for a male gaze, the female nude was referred to as a Venus, the mythological connotation thus amortizing any potential moral disruption. Her often reclined position and averted gaze, or simply her role as concubine or slave, allowed her to be passively consumed by her male viewer without acting as a sexual threat. Veiled in allegory to convey political conquest for example, her body, or its violation, becomes a vehicle for political ideology while providing male audiences with acceptable erotic content and glorifying, even normalizing the forcible subjugation of women by men through sexual violence.474 Modern art sees the female nude become a preferred vehicle for experi-

mentation in medium specificity. She is a faceless bather, dancer or the fetishized colonial other.\textsuperscript{475} Both her figuration and her gradual abstraction in paint mirror her immiseration as a body in service. Accordingly, the disciplining of the female body in representation speaks to a social, cultural and political exigency to do so, as though it had the capacity to disrupt the established order and the apparatuses which support it.

Titian’s \textit{Venus of Urbino} (1538), Francois Boucher’s \textit{Portrait of Mary Louise O’-Murphy} (1752) and more overtly, Courbet’s \textit{L’Origine du Monde} (1866) are all images of the female body exposed in a manner which allows it to escape the disruptive capacity that artworks such as Manet’s \textit{Olympia} (1865) and Picasso’s \textit{Les Demoiselles} did not. The former, images of passive female nudes whose bodies the male gaze is free to objectify, offer a construction of woman which is limited to her body and to that body’s supposed natural obligation and availability to man. Titian’s \textit{Venus} was commissioned within a matrimonial context whereby the woman depicted is said to be the Duke of Urbino’s fiancé who was still too young to consummate the marriage. The painting served as somewhat an erotic consolation prize for the Duke while he waited for his bride to come of age. Mary Louise O’Murphy was the young Irish mistress of King Louis XV and Courbet’s painting was commissioned to be part of the erotic collection of a Turkish-Egyptian diplomat named Khalil-Bey before it ironically ended up in the hands of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. The disruptive potential of their bodies is nullified, mediated by their function to exist for and assuage male sexual desire. These bodies are labouring bodies, they are productive in their passivity as their labour has been determined by a male gaze and a historical trajectory which has reduced their purpose to

\textsuperscript{475} I refer here to Cézanne, Degas and Gauguin respectively.
one of sexual (or reproductive) obligation. One is a wife, the other a mistress and the last, an orifice. They are either property or objects of pleasure.

I need not reiterate the impact Manet’s *Olympia* (1863) had on bourgeois Paris in 1865. Nor do I need to review why the painting figures as the starting point of most entry level art history surveys on modernism and the *avant-garde*. *Olympia*, just as the women depicted by Picasso in *Les Demoiselles*, is a prostitute. While, as a woman within a masculinist cultural framework, she is always already a labouring body, in this case, that labour, her body more overtly, is now openly implicated in the modern process of market exchange. Her gaze, focused on the bourgeois viewer in the place of the incoming patron, and most importantly her hand, concealing her genitals, all articulate the demand for a wage.476 She overtly reflects, less than twenty years following the revolutions of 1848 and the triumph of bourgeois interests over democratic values, capitalism’s conversion of the body’s productive capacity into both labour and commodity for the purpose of accumulation. In this case, that reality is made all the more problematic because said labour derives from the female body’s sexual capacity which men are freely entitled to. The same can be said of *Les Demoiselles* and in both cases, the formal quality of the works mirror the violence done to the body under capital; the abstraction of value from the body visually conveyed via an increasingly abstract formal language. However, I contend that that which makes these paintings of naked, sexually “available” women more socially disruptive to bourgeois sensibilities than the previous examples of reclining nudes, is not exclusively limited to their exposure of the modern conditi-

tion’s bitter realities, but rather that their availability or labour power is subject to a price. Female sexual labour has either been a resource that man has been entitled to or a commodity for exchange as dictated by patriarchal ownership of her body and person. In this case, that function is exposed as labour proper, performed as part of a commercial exchange and demanding a wage, thereupon disrupting the long established consensus that her work is part of a natural obligation and thus not work at all. Furthermore, the dual condition of the prostitute, or rather her body, as labour power and commodity, exposes in all its fleshly immediacy, the human labour power usually concealed by the commodity object, while usurping the usually reified social relations existing under capital due to the intimate nature of the work. The figure of the prostitute makes visible the usually concealed conditions of alienation from the body which occurs under capital. She also makes literal the fact that sexual labour is a form of labour expected of all women though usually unpaid, exposing, in consideration of the intimate nature of the sexual act, a form of alienation specific to women which exceeds that experienced by men. Also, viewed in this manner, the trajectory of the female nude in painting exposes the female body as the worker body par excellence; constructed by a gaze as perpetually available, her very existence is tantamount to “being” qua working in service of the male viewer, and that condition of labouring is finally made visible with the demand for renumeration. Sylvia Federici in her 1975 text *Why Sexuality is Work* writes: “we have been set up as the providers of sexual satisfaction…” and for that reason “sex is work.” Furthermore, she points out that economic dependance amounted to ownership of the female

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sexual body. Women have thus had to consent to their own subjugation for survival well before men ever had to under capital. EXPORT, in Genital Panik, exposes the locus of female subjugation in a manner which functions as an act of strike against that worker function, against obligation and against the body’s mediation by the male gaze as an extension of his “ownership” or defining her in terms of her perpetual sexual availability. Furthermore, aesthetically, she resists the use of a traditional medium, painting, already encoded as male, as a way to reclaim the means of representing the female body which historically have mirrored her immiseration. EXPORT employs action, activating and thus making visible the body of the artist traditionally veiled by the canvas. This gesture was already popular among artists whose bodies differed from the white male body. Not only is she making the site of difference visible, but she employs photography to do so, a medium which she felt was not already owned by male aesthetic tradition. This point, is debatable, especially considering its use in consumer culture and advertising which in the postwar period emerged as another means of disciplining women by packaging them as dutiful housewives or sex objects.

Within the period of the 1950s and 60s and the context of the postwar economic boom and the influx of american mass media into Europe, the disciplining of women was packaged and sold along with consumer household goods in the form of the dutiful house-

\[\text{Ibid.}\]

\[\text{See Amelia Jones, } \text{Body Art/Performing the Subject,} \ (1998) \text{and Roselee Goldberg Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present (New York, NY: Abrams Books, 1988).}\]

\[\text{EXPORT shared this view in an interview in her studio in Vienna of September 2016. She said: “Video was very important for women artists in the 70s because it was not yet historically coded as male by artist”. It played a large part in her body of work which she claims to be an interrogation of our perception of reality.}\]
wife. For many advertisements from the 1950s, 60s and 70s did little to conceal their misogynist character, emphasizing woman’s duties towards husband and household, normalizing domestic violence or overtly stating women’s inferiority. Woman is either domesticated, seduced, tamed or even sedated. For many young women who came of age in the postwar period, especially in Europe and in post-fascist contexts, the prospect of dedicating their lives to the bearing of children and reproductive labour had little appeal. This is especially true of Italy, a country whose late industrialization, fascist past and postwar economic boom gave rise to anti-authoritarian left-wing struggle in the form of the Autonomist movements of the 1970s. It is against this backdrop that the previously mentioned Italian feminist struggle arose, one less concerned with examining women’s oppression from the point of view of symbolic relations and the structure of language as per the French psychoanalytical model, and more concerned with social relations or women’s subordinate position within a capitalist


Many advertisements from the 1950s, 60s and 70s did little to conceal their misogynist character. For example an advertisement for Kellogg Pep vitamins in which a man is seen embracing a woman wearing an apron and carrying a feather duster pictured next to the text exclaiming “The harder a wife works, the cuter she looks!” In an ad for Chase and Sandborn Coffee, a woman receives a spanking from her husband, a warning to all housewives who dare not purchase the very freshest coffee. Mr. Leggs clothing brand chose to advertise men’s pants by picturing a man standing with one foot on a woman’s head, her body represented as a tiger skin rug. The advertisement exclaims, “It’s good to have a girl around the house,” adding that the pants will have her ready for him to walk all over her. In a print advertisement for Serax (oxazepam or a form of anti-anxiety medication) a woman is depicted looking directly at the viewer, clearly overwhelmed, her eyes pained and anxiously biting her nails. She is surrounded by brooms, mops and an iron while the caption states: “You can’t set her free. But you can help her feel less anxious.”
mode of production and a leftist struggle focused entirely on the waged worker. While Sylvia Federici more recently traced primitive accumulation’s dependance on the violent disciplining of women’s bodies, Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James in *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, examined women’s role, namely that of the housewife, created by a capitalist division of labour, and this contemporaneously with the Autonomous struggle within which women were struggling to find their place. Dalla Costa placed the figure of the housewife, her isolation within the home and exclusion from the wage, at the centre of her analysis of women’s exploitation. As the nexus of the nuclear family, the basis for the capitalist social order, she remains the body upon which accumulation ultimately hinges. Enslaved to the newly freed waged worker, excluded from the realm of production and confined to the home, women are relegated to pre-capitalist working conditions while forced to operate within a system in which social relations are organized around the production of surplus-value, dictated by socially necessary labour time, in exchange for a wage. Crucially, her never-ending reproductive labour as an integral part of the production of surplus-value, is never acknowledged. As Dalla Costa points out, she is therefore always

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483 The French model I speak of is reflected in the works of Kristeva and Luce Irigaray who believed that “women need to interpret their present situation and stays not only in economic terms but in symbolic terms.” Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 21.

484 Dalla Costa and James are careful to articulate that even working women are expected to be housewives. Access to the workplace only adds to their already existing workload instead of providing them with any sort of equality with men.

on duty and her work is never done.\textsuperscript{486} The temporal rhythm of chrematistics excavated in Chapter I, or the waged working day, never applies to women’s assigned labour, as it is understood to be a service, performed out of love, or naturalized to her biological condition. Even her sexual life is usurped and “transformed into a function for reproducing labour power.”\textsuperscript{487} Dalla Costa's seminal text\textsuperscript{488} further supports my claim that woman is inscribed as a worker body, though that worker function is further obscured within a system in which social relation are structured around the wage from which she is excluded and due to her labour’s tethering to love and care. Crucially, the text articulates the women’s movement to be the “revolt of those who have been excluded, who have been separated from the system of production” and in view of this have been rendered dependant on one hand and presumed “incapable of being subjects of social revolt.”\textsuperscript{489} This exclusion from the wage and isolation within the home articulates a certain political impotence within class struggle and in relation to the state, which is structured around the social relations dictated by production. It is also consistent with a state of exclusion, which I argue women occupy from the very foundations of Western political discourse, a point which will be revisited later in this chapter. This political disempowerment experienced by women as an extension of the sexual division of labour was


\textsuperscript{488} I am referring here to the text written by Dalla Costa in 1971 titled “Women and the Subversion of the Community” which more specifically addresses what she calls “the capitalist function of the uterus” and women’s sexuality in relation to their dependance on the waged worker.

keenly felt in the aftermath of fascism, a political model whose hyper masculinity required women to be submissive to men and devoted to motherhood. Sylvia Federici, one of the founding members of the *Lotta Femminista per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico* along with Dalla Costa, explains that considering the devastation of two world wars, the notion of dedicating one’s life to producing more workers and soldiers for the state was a prospect which no longer had any hold on women’s imagination.\(^{490}\) For the first time, the feminist struggle was not going to be fought in the home, within the space delineated for women, but rather would be a full rejection of women’s sequestering to that space and to the duties associated with it. Federici says:

> That for the first time, feminism implied a lack of identification with reproduction not only when done for others but even when imagined for our families and kin, can possibly be attributed to the watershed that the war constituted for women, especially since its threat never ended, but escalated with the threat of nuclear weapons.\(^{491}\)

There is a particular tension here between women’s resistance against housework and domesticity following the war, and that role having been prescribed by a patriarchal, capitalist system based on technological rationality; the same system responsible for applying that rationality to the production of weapons and the destruction of life through state-led violence.

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\(^{490}\) See the introduction to Sylvia Federici’s *Revolution at Point Zero Housework: Reproduction and Feminist Struggle*. She speaks here in particular of women in Italy who experienced life under fascism in relation to the particular concerns raised by the feminist movements in the 1970s.

EXPORT’s guarding of her exposed genitals with a gun, both a cipher for the phallus\footnote{For more on the “phallus” in psychoanalytical discourse see Derek Hook, “Lacan, the meaning of the phallus and the ‘sexed’ subject.” In The Gender of Psychology. Edited by Tamara Shefer, Floretta Boonzaier and Peace Kiguwa (Juta Academic Publishing, Lansdowne, South Africa, 2006), 60-84. http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/960.} which psychoanalytical discourse has insisted she is lacking and an emblem of state violence, functions as a threat directed towards a gendered political order, whose capacity for devastating aggression had been made abundantly clear and so had its failure in claiming moral high ground. That established order could no longer, in the eyes of many women of the period demand their bodies to labour on its behalf; to cook, clean, love, fuck and nurture life, if it insisted on continually threatening it with exhaustive labour and/or state violence. This may seem tautological as labour, it could be argued, within a capitalist political economy whose policies function to protect bourgeois interests, is in itself a form of state violence. Furthermore, the Cold War in the West arguably represents the culmination of conditions initiated, as per Marx, from the failures of 1848: the hitching of politics to the preservation of capitalist
interests and the state emerging as an external apparatus of control.\footnote{See Marx, \textit{18th Brumaire} and Hobsbawm, \textit{Age of Capital}.} That is, the state’s readiness to deploy weapons of mass destruction in the interest of preserving a capitalist political economy regardless of the consequences for its population. It is manifest in the threat of the Bomb which made clear the devaluation of life and the prioritization of preserving the conditions necessary for capitalism to thrive at any cost. \textit{Genital Panik}, therefore, as an act of strike against capital, can thus be considered as an act of strike against the state which protects it.

Returning to EXPORT’s unveiling in \textit{Genital Panik} in relation to the privatization of the female body through her domestic role, she exposes only that which has sentenced woman to servitude, the marker of sexual difference and the locus of her expected and enforced sexual passivity. With this display, EXPORT reminds the viewer of the centrality of genitalia to women’s subordination in relation to her body’s materiality and the sexual and reproductive service constructed as a natural extension of that biology. Nowhere is this worker function made more evident than in the aforementioned figure of the housewife considering that her labour (simply in terms of caretaker) is perpetual and concealed while her body is mined as an infinite source of use-value within the home, the couple-form and crucially, the nuclear family; “the very pillar of the capitals organization of work.”\footnote{Dalla Costa, “Women and the Subversion of the Community,” (1971)} EXPORT, in her un-
veiling, resists the tradition of the privatized female.\textsuperscript{495} Formally, and conversely, EXPORT goes against the trope of the passive female nude, whose entire body is exposed save for her genitals usually covered by a hand or drapery. However, her straightforward gaze prevents her reduction to a mere body part or orifice. Nor does she appear as the male constructed image of the lustful and sexually predatory female or to the prostitute haughtily demanding renumeration for labour which man has always been freely entitled to. She escapes these constructions of woman, these equations of woman with corporeality, labour or sexual deviance even while exposing the site which has caused her to be defined as such.\textsuperscript{496} In the act of unveiling only that which attracts and terrifies, that which is abject even to her as it is the part of her body over which (historically) she has had no ownership, the part of her body which has sentenced her to being a sexual object, guarantor of patrilneal continuity and caretaker, she strikes against her own reification and alienation. I argue, therefore, that at the core of \textit{Genital Panik} is an act of strike against the worker function to which women have been essentialized. It is an act of non-participation directed towards a state of being, as private property, and the sexual and domestic labour to which that determination has condemned her.

Carla Lonzi in \textit{Let's Spit on Hegel!} suggests that the archetype of private property was

\textsuperscript{495} Dalla Costa and James suggest that dismantling the privatization of woman is the key to the organization of collective struggle and solidarity among women. I would however add that key to this is the dismantling of the couple form. See Vanessa Parent, “The Wife, the Whore and the Single Girl: On the Intersection of Sex and Housework within the Couple Form.” \textit{Blindfield: A Journal of Cultural Inquiry}. (October 13, 2016) https://blindfieldjournal.com/2016/10/13/the-wife-the-whore-and-the-single-girl-on-the-intersection-of-sex-and-housework-within-the-couple-form/.

\textsuperscript{496} For more on women being associated with corporeality see Elizabeth Grosz, “Introduction” in \textit{Volatile Bodies}, (1994).
woman as sexual object, the first object ever conceived by man.\textsuperscript{497} That sexual objectification is the foundation of the natural purpose, or work, attributed to women by a male episteme and the strategies historically imposed on its behalf. She thus strikes against that which has rendered her a worker body; the difference inscribed upon her genitals. In revealing the site of her inscription, she resists the social, cultural and historical disciplining of her body, a disciplining to which women have had to submit and participate in for survival.\textsuperscript{498} The gesture of strike goes beyond a simple refusal to work, but rather a rejection of an ontic condition and of structures which support it. The gesture embodies what Carla Lonzi calls a new stage of consciousness for woman which “claims that no human being or group should either define themselves or be defined in terms of another human being or group” and who “rejects the levels both of quality and of difference, as a dilemma imposed upon her by male power.”\textsuperscript{499}


\textsuperscript{498} A body biologically born female is a body vulnerable to violence and aggression. In her text \textit{Caliban and the Witch:} Sylvia Federici traces the disciplining of the female body, her reproductive and sexual capacity especially, that accompanied the rise of capitalism. This disciplining was also fundamentally Christian as the witch hunts were a large part of this process of disciplining through the purging of dangerous bodies which contributed to women participating in their own subjugation out of fear.

\textsuperscript{499} Lonzi, \textit{Let’s Spit on Hegel}, 4.
Reproductive Life and the “State of Exclusion”

*It is only males who are created directly by the gods and are given souls…it is only men who are complete human beings…the best a woman can hope for is to become a man.*

-Plato, *Timaeus* 90s, 360 BCE.

In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Giorgio Agamben excavates biopolitics’ implicit position within Western political discourse from its very beginnings, refuting the notion that it is a modern phenomenon. He does so through the ancient figure of *Homo Sacer* and Aristotle’s definitions of life (*zoe/bios*) to argue for a possibility that sovereignty, as a power over life and death, is an integral part of Western political theory. In *The State of Exception*, he follows up his theory by arguing that once a temporary measure of control, the state of exception, in the twentieth century, has become an intrinsic part of biopolitical governance. In the former text, Agamben begins by differentiating the two terms used in Ancient Greece to speak of life: *bios* referring to a way of living or a qualified life proper to an individual or a group, and *zoe* which denoted natural life or animal life common to all living beings. He is careful to precisely locate these two forms of life whereby *bios* belonged to the realm the *polis* and *zoe* which was “excluded from the *polis* in the strict sense,” remaining “confined-as merely reproductive life-to the sphere of the *oikos*, ‘home.’”

500 Modern politics has been understood by figures such as Foucault, as the meeting of these fundamentally separate realms, that is, the entrance of *zoe* into the political sphere implying the shift from sovereign power to biopolitics. However, Agamben amends this by stating: “the inclusion of

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bare life in the political realm constitutes the original, if concealed, nucleus of sovereign power. It can even be said that the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power. Biopolitics was thus always already present in sovereign power. He articulates this through *Homo Sacer*, the ancient figure of Roman law who, stripped of his political rights (*bios*), is reduced to “bare life,” or natural life and thus is caught in a juridicial relationship of excluded inclusion with the sovereign power that expelled it, and could be killed without legal consequence. Agamben argues, it is by way of these exclusions that inclusion, being that which characterizes the state as such, came to define itself: “In Western politics, bare life has the peculiar privilege of being that whose exclusion founds the city of men.” In this way, he argues that, from the very beginning, natural life has been politicized and, therefore, biopolitics is not exclusive to the modern nation state but rather woven into the very fabric of Western political thought and practice. In other words, the modern state’s ability to act beyond the law, to exercise sovereign power and reduce to bare life those perceived as a threat to the biological life of its citizens, of which the state is constituted, is part and parcel of this originary community which, according to Jean-Luc Nancy, modern politics has consistently attempted to recapture. Thus, the political community in the West has always been defined by that which it juridically excludes. While Agamben’s suggestion in relation to Nancy illuminates the tragic aspect of our *hamartia*, it also implies a collapse in the distinc-

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502 Agamben states that *Homo Sacer* is in a “continuous relationship with the power that banished him precisely insofar as he is at every instant exposed to an unconditional threat of death.” (183)

tion between biopolitics (the politicization of zoe) and sovereign power, along with the notion of history qua progress in the process.

My intention in invoking this political philosophy is to examine how a political history and form of governance based on the capacity to place members in a “state of exception” can be more broadly applied to the position of women as being placed in a “state of exclusion.” While the expendability of life implied by the “state of exception” is more visible in terms of political power’s inherent capacity for cruelty, on a micro-scale, in terms of its social foundations from which the political springs, it has been founded upon a politics of exclusion based on bodily difference in relation to the dominant group. This exclusion, rather than figuring as an isolated event such as “the state of exception,” is no less brutal in its inherent and normalized violence. This, can inform an understanding of women as occupying a “state of exclusion” from the beginnings of Western political thought thus accounting for their heterogeneity and the state’s interest in their discipline. While invoking this discussion of biopolitics speaks to the totality of the historical and intellectual trajectory examined in this study, in terms of the terrifying potentialities afforded by the marriage of Enlightenment’s fidelity to its own internal logic and Romanticism’s fidelity to the organic body of the nation actualized in National Socialism, my interest is to demonstrate how the female body has always been determined and excluded. It has a been excluded from the onset of Western politi-

504 There are many examples of this anxiety directed towards bodies influencing exclusionary policies throughout history, whether as a means to protect a population, maintain control or express superiority. The designation of anyone living outside of the hellenic world as barbarian is but one example. During the Middle Ages, the margins of Mappa Mundi were littered with monstrous figures whose body’s reflected their exclusion from the Christian world. Furthermore, imperialism and colonial expansion rationalized the enslavement and persecution of non-white people further demonstrating that Western dominance has been built upon systemic exclusion.
cal discourse on the basis of her biology, along with other bodies that deviate from a discursively constructed normative body. It is therefore useful to consider the originary exclusion, predating the “state of exception,” of certain bodies from a political and intellectual foundation upon which modern politics was erected, rendering the determination of women’s bodies and hence, their historical subjugation, politically and discursively contingent.

As previously outlined, zoe designated the mere fact of biological or reproductive life while bios qualified that life as political or otherwise. Bios belonged to the realm of political inclusion which in Ancient Greece would be reserved exclusively for men. Zoe, on the other hand, being the fact of biological life or reproductive life, was excluded from the polis and confined to the realm of the oikos or the home, the realm to which women belonged. Women had no political rights, were under the guardianship of their husbands or male relatives and were expected to remain confined to the home with their main function being reproduction. It is reasonable to conclude therefore that women would be qualified as zoe, therefore historically excluded from political life by virtue of their body as site of biological difference. For women, therefore, the body is the original site of determination by intellectual and political discourse. While unlike Homo Sacer, who is forcibly reduced to zoe thus becoming bare life, and cast-off onto the margins of society, the process of exclusion undergone by those biologically born female is naturalized. It is not an exception, as her death


506 See Charlotte Witt, “Feminist History of Philosophy” in Feminist Reflections on the History of Philosophy, eds. Lilli Alanen and Charlotte Witt (New York: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004) 1-17. Aristotle believed that “a female is an incomplete male or ‘as it were, a deformity’; which contributes only matter and not form to the generation of offspring” and “in general woman is an inferior being.” (3).
would be a crime, but rather an exclusion to which she is born. However her death would be a crime only insofar as she is property and she is further saved from full exception because of the polis’ reliance on her biological reproductive capacity. She is however, excluded from political life and from existence as anything else but biological life or body. Her exclusion is the norm as opposed to being a process constitutive of political community, such as the state of exception argued by Agamben, making her marginalization unworthy of theorization in terms of its wider political implications and stakes. In short, while this process of marginalization has always existed in Western society, it has either been a matter of choice, for example in the case of Monastic orders in the Middle Ages, or a matter of sovereign legal power. The process of exclusion experienced by women, is a biological given. As private property and reproducers of life, their value shielded them from the position of bare life, subject to being killed with impunity while their construction as sexual objects by male culture rendered them potentially disruptive to a male dominated social order. Both factors make her exclusion a necessity for the maintenance of male supremacy. Furthermore the veiled condition of her exclusion has been guaranteed by her affective labour, the love and care which accompany her reproductive role. Her role as reproducer, caregiver, lover and wife to the superior man upon whom she depends, makes her “state of exclusion” go unacknowledged and naturalized to her perceived faulty biology, that is, her body whose very reproductive capacity is paradoxically of most value to the community and one which capitalism quite literally put to work without a wage. It is her originary reduction to her biology, her existence as zoe within the very beginnings of Western thought and politics, which Agamben suggests are not abandoned but folded into our modern processes, that makes addressing the female body as a
site of determination and subordination, crucial to the subject of social fragmentation, as well as to a consideration of the female body’s potential as site of resistance and refusal.

Any mention of the body in feminist discourse, runs the risk of reinforcing a misogynist reduction of women’s “social and economic role to (pseudo) biological terms” or rather of re-inscribing an essentialist confinement of women to their biological reproductive role.\footnote{Grozs. *Volatile Bodies*, 14.} However, considering its impact on women’s lived experience for centuries, and its continued relevance to women in underdeveloped countries and of lower socio-economic backgrounds, it is exactly this construction of women as biologically given worker bodies that must be continually addressed. Thus, beneath the economic condition of women’s subjugation which had emerged as a chief concern of feminists of the 1960s and 1970s, lies a corporeal grounding to their oppression. Addressing this corporeal grounding necessarily supports an already existing corporeal exigency within the struggle against capitalist exploitation. For women, who historically have been excluded from the wage, from the market and the production of commodities for exchange, labour power has been naturalized to their biological ability to bear children and their “innate” capacity for care, robbing their domestic and reproductive labour of its character as toil. With the rise of capital, another means of disciplining women and assimilating them to the dominant order appeared in the form of the housewife. Excluded from the wage and fully dependant on the couple form, her position was further normalized with the rise of consumer culture, which sought to make her non-productive body one which could further contribute to the growth of capital through consumption. By the 1970s, considerable backlash against this “natural destiny” was widespread and became man-
ifest most notably in the aforementioned *Lotta Feminista Contro per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico*, a feminist movement started in Northern Italy and which spread across Europe and North America. The movement, as previously mentioned, rose out of a generation of women who came of age during the war, within a “patriarchal culture consolidated under fascism.” Furthermore, in the midst of the *miracolo italiano* and the rise of the Autonomist Marxism, an understanding of the centrality of the wage to the means by which society was structured and governed came to the fore, and thus so did its centrality to political and feminist struggle. Women’s exclusion from the wage and their resulting political impotence, made demanding a salary for labour which had been naturalized to their gender, a potent political act. In retrospect it would do little to dismantle capitalist exploitation, but rather keep it on life support. On the campaign’s *Notice to All Governments*, a piece of ephemera in the *Archivio di Lotta Femminista per il salari al Lavoro Domestico* at the University of Padua in Italy, alongside the threat of strike and the description of women’s unwaged work, is an image of a woman whose body conceals a factory, fully equipped with smoke stacks and workers. The drawing makes literal the expectation imposed upon women to be perpetually productive in their biologically given reproductive role. It also signals the concealed character of that labour, lodged within her due to that supposed biological givenness and her subsequent exclusion from the wage. Her body does not only hold within it the expectation of labour, but


509 See Federici, “Introduction” in *Revolution at Point Zero* for more on the geo-political and historical specificity of the Wages for Housework movement.
it also safeguards the smooth operation of a society based on the capital-labour relation. The image also formally conveys the notion of woman as “worker body.” The line between body and labour is blurred, compromising the visibility of capitalism’s exploitative nature in relation to women’s bodies and women’s assigned reproductive role. The ephemera renders visible how, with the transition to capital, her arguable categorization as zoe has led to the growth and nurturing of capital. It signals the greater implications of her role in the organization of capitalist society as a whole and to women’s value in terms of their reproductive forces. Her body houses capitalism itself, gestates it, as capitalism relies on her reproduction of a labour force who will produce and consume. Viewed in this manner, capitalism has had a vested interest in keeping women’s bodies under strict control, in maintaining her as zoe through various means of discipline including state and juridical violence, excluding her from the wage and privatizing her body and sexuality within the heterosexual couple form.

By the 1970s, sex was folded into the debates about unpaid reproductive labour as evidenced by Sylvia Federici’s *Why Sexuality is Work* and Dalla Costa *Women and the Subversion of the Community*. Both texts call for a form of strike against the affective and sexual dimensions of women’s role within the couple form as they too are dictated by the social conditions imposed by labour-wage relations, which make love, care and sex an extension of duties in exchange for the securing of material needs. That is, an extension of her unpaid labour and thus...

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of her working day, concretizing her position as a worker body on the margins of, and yet supporting, an economic and political system ensconced in a history of male power.

The Scope of the Visible and the Striking Body

As discussed throughout this chapter, EXPORT’S exposure of her genitals in *Genital Panik* is not only an act of strike against a mode of production in which her work is doubly veiled, producing no object of exchange and going unwaged thus not considered as work, or against an art historical construction of Woman. It is also a strike against discourse which has defined her in relation to what she is not, that is, “not man.” As a result woman’s function has been determined in relation to that ontological fact. This intellectual trajectory also equated her with corporeality and thus to volatile nature while early psychoanalysis defined her in relation to a male physical wholeness (penis envy), insisting on her castration, her incomplete psychical development and the disavowal of her own brand of sexual capacity or libido. In other words, *Genital Panik* functions as a refusal of modernity’s discursive trajectories, borrowed from an idealized past and repeated as part of the same *hamartia* which perpetuates the cycle of subjugation and civilizing processes. EXPORT does this partly by disrupting the objectifying gaze especially within the context of the performance in the experimental film

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512 See Samuel Slipp, *The Freudian Mystique: Freud, Women and Feminism* (New York: NYU Press, 1993). For example, Freud argues in the *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*: “Girls remain in it (the Oedipal complex)...they demolish it late and, even so, incompletely. In these circumstances the formation of the super-ego must suffer...and feminists are not pleased when we point out to them the effects of this factor upon the average feminine character (...) The fact that women must be regarded as having little sense of justice is no doubt related to the predominance of envy in their mental life...We also regard women a sweater in their social interest and as having less capacity for sublimating their instincts than men...A woman of the same age (as a man of 30)...frightens us by her psychical rigidity and unchangeability...There are no paths open to further development...the difficult development to femininity had exhausted the possibilities of the person concerned.” (12).
house. She brings the site of her determination into the scopic field, with that scopic field as 
designating the full realm of visibility, necessarily being a male space. By this I mean 
that, considering historically contingent social hierarchies, although the scopic field is sub-
jective, for people who occupy a marginalized position, there is an understanding that they 
occupy a subordinate position within the totality of the visual field. This also relates to the hamartia which has guided this inquiry, whereby the myopia to social separation relates to 
one’s inability to view the totality of history and the present conditions it created, especially 
the varying degrees of alienation and marginalization experienced by people who do not oc-
cupy a normative subject position.

Considering that vision is limited to the eye, the scopic field also reflects the limits of 
the experience of the visible. The gaze, to Merleau-Ponty, makes one aware of their position as 
both subject and object, that we are “beings that are looked at in, the spectacle of the 
world.” Lacan expands upon this saying:


515 This is important to consider in relation to the intersection of various processes of marginalization which people can occupy. While this chapter has addressed people biologically born female in relation to a binary discursive framework, its purpose is to expose the constructedness and oppressive nature of that framework in terms of its focus on bodily difference. This conversation can therefore be expanded to examine those who do not identify as cis gendered or heteronormative.

Is there no satisfaction in being under that gaze...that circumscribes us and which in the first instance makes us beings who are looked at, but without showing it? (...) The spectacle of the world in this sense, appears to us as all-seeing...At the very level of the phenomenological experience of contemplation, this all seeing aspect is to be found in the satisfaction of a woman who knows that she is being looked at, on condition that one does not show her that one knows that she does.  

Lacan, in this rather misogynistic explanation discusses the pleasure derived from being seen, but also the gendered character of the gaze and of its discursively constructed visual environment, a gendering to which history could testify. Following this, Lacan argues that the position of the object, its gaze, is that which draws attention to the inadequacies of the subject’s own gaze and this limitation is experienced as a lack or “castration anxiety.” This gaze or limitation is experienced, I argue, by the seated movie-goers in the moment of EX-PORT’s performance in the film house. That is, when the viewer encounters the artist’s genitals directly and in the flesh, the very body part constructed as designating an absence. Not only is the act of viewing the screen and the male gaze interrupted and thus mediated by the body shuffling through the rows, but the anxiety caused by the gaze of that long objectified

517 Ibid.

518 See Henry Krips, “The Politics of the Gaze: Foucault, Lacan and Zizek” in Culture Unbound, vol. 2, (2010): 91-102. Hosted by Linkoping University Electronic Press: http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se. Krips says: “...the gaze may be thought of as an external point from which an anxiety provoking look assails the subject. But and this is crucial, the point in question is definitely not an eye that looks back at the subject... It is point of failure in the visual field...As Lacan emphasizes, a gaze must also precipitate anxiety which, in turn, transforms the viewer’s look into a self-directed, passive ‘being looked at... The gaze, Lacan then adds, ‘is presented to us only in the form of a strange contingency, symbolic of...the lack that constitutes castration anxiety... it surprises (the viewer)... disturbs him and reduces him to a feeling of shame” (93).
body redirected at the viewer, makes visceral the point of failure in the scopic field. In this manner, by being caught looking by her genitals’ gaze, the male viewer experiences a doubling of castration anxiety. What makes *Genital Panik* so disruptive to the male gaze is not that she confronts it or intercepts it with her material body, but rather that she makes that objectifying gaze visible, as an object itself.\(^{519}\) EXPORT thus exposes the scopic field as gendered, as one always already dominated by visual relationships which have rendered women objects for men’s visual and sexual pleasure construed as their natural purpose. In doing so she interrupts it, forcing a recognition of her subjectivity, disrupting the visual field which mediates her and claiming the means to self-determination in the process.

**Flesh, Determination and Recursion**

The body as bearer of signs, its determination by invisible processes such as language, discourse and history and its own participation in that process of determination, is enacted recursively in *Eros/ion* (1971), giving form to the historical problem outlined at the onset of this project. However, in this case the signs are illegible, without a clear referent (such as EXPORT’s garter in *body sign action* for example), hence speaking to the veiled character of the collective body problem haunting a modern political project. In *Eros/ion*, I argue, the recursive character of historical wounding is performed via a repetitive and passive gesture of procedural violence inflicted directly onto the artist’s body.\(^{520}\) Whereas Brus alluded to

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520 By “passive,” I mean that instead of performing a violent gesture, the artist places herself in a position where external forces will act upon her. Instead of actively pressing a shard of glass into her flesh, she lies upon the glass, allowing her body weight to press down into the glass.
and aestheticized self-mutilation by placing the latent violence inflicted on the body in dialogue with painting, EXPORT repeatedly rolled her naked body over shards of glass. Although flesh rolling over broken glass necessarily implies the danger and real possibility of cutting, pain, marking or scarring, the wounding which actually occurred was minimal, thus mimicking the subtlety or imperceptibility of the latent violence history has imposed on the human body, the battlefield upon which the struggle between History and Myth has been fought. Instead of subjecting her body, or the body of others, to more overtly destructive gestures or desecration as her male counterparts did, EXPORT metaphorically enacts the processes and technologies of subjection through her own brand of procedural violence. After rolling over the broken shards, EXPORT continued by rolling over an intact plane of glass and then a broad sheet of paper, the paper then bearing the traces of the glass clinging to her body. While Jackson Pollock’s canvas’ mapped the body’s gesture behind his painting on one hand, and Nitsch’s white sheets registered the body’s release of blocked urges on the other, the paper in Eros/ion’s case acts as an indexical record of the body as surface of inscription. In this manner, I argue that the work functions less as an act of reclamation through self-infliction but rather one of demonstration and denouncement; she enacts and makes physically visible the impact of one’s obligation to exist in oppressive conditions and to participate in their maintenance. This is a circumstance more keenly felt by women due to a forced depen-

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521 Mueller, in VALUE EXPORT, says: “injuries were because the glass used was very thin and tended to move laterally when pressed down.” (34).

522 The double entendre here is purposeful as it references the branding of the body as a form of violent subjugation.

523 I refer here to Nitsch’s beating of lamb carcasses allowing the fluids to burst forth onto a sheet in Die Blutorgel for example.
dance on men and due to this dependancy’s direct relationship to their body, its reproductive and sexual capacity and therefore, its determined purpose in society. It is their body, mediated by culture, which has sentenced them to this state-of-being.

The artist also repeated this process over and over again for a number of minutes. Roswitha Mueller argues that the action signifies the reclamation of the body as an “overcoming of determination,” due to the action’s self-directed quality. She views the work as an “exercise in semantics” where the “body as a bearer of self-inflicted signs creates another meaning out of its wounded state.”

What takes place is a change in context. And this is the other emphasis of the performance: glass, when broken, signifies cutting and pain, and yet when in one piece, as a window pane, it signifies transparency. Context overrides material. Similarly, the self-imposed engraving of the skin in an aesthetic context could be seen to represent the overcoming of social and cultural imprints (body sign action is based on the same notion).

While I appreciate the argument for agency and self-determination, I argue that the work demands a more nuanced assessment, especially considering the repetitive nature of Eros/ion and the fact that her previous work, body sign action also engaged with the notion of the body as surface of inscription, functioning as a spectre of a culture’s technologies of control and its most subtle and unseen means of “containing” the body. The action exposed the pro-

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524 Mueller, VALIE EXPORT, 35.

525 Ibid.

526 Ibid.
cesses which mark the body, and the body’s conditioning in allowing itself to be inscribed, at times in a recursive manner, and myopic to its own wounding. In body sign action for example, she makes permanent that which can be removed and makes visible that which is concealed,\textsuperscript{527} emphasizing the lingering effects of social and cultural determination; the latent violence that civilizing processes imposed upon the body and to which the body (especially the female body) is conditioned to submit. In Eros/ion, the artist enacts the violent processes by which the body comes to be inscribed, processes which are paradoxically both inflicted and repeated due to unwitting submission, analogous to hamartia. It also enacts the process of recursion tied to this historical wounding. While the shards of glass inflict a mark or pain, the subsequent rolling on an intact plane of glass can cause the shards left on the body to become further imbedded into the flesh. Conversely, the pane of glass, I argue, due to its transparency, functions to convey the innocuous and unseen nature of processes of mediation as well as the blind submission to potentially threatening conditions, with that threatening potential reflected in the dialectical tension between the broken glass and the intact pane upon which she willingly lays down her body. When her body then rolls onto the paper, the paper acts as a visual register of the glass’ adherence to her body. As a ghostly imprint of that which determines it.

\textsuperscript{527} There is a double entendre here. With the tattoo, the garter which a women removes every day is made permanent, this very permanence mirroring the enduring nature of social and cultural determination. Also, as a tattoo, it makes visible the concealed determination of the body which these unseen apparatuses of control inflict, while the photograph exposes the “undergarment” which propriety would keep concealed beneath a woman’s skirt. Thus it is not in the tattoo itself that I locate the act of self-determination, but in the unveiling of the tattoo and in the self-proclamation of wounding which the tattoo implies.
The repetitive nature of EXPORT’s gesture in *Eros/ion* also demands further attention. Export repeats the process over and over despite the discomfort it inflicts. It begs a return to the discussion of repetition and recursion which opened Chapter I of this text. To remind the reader, Lacan in *The Unconscious and Repetition* posits that “the unconscious is structured like a language.” Accordingly, the development of the chain of signification which forms the warp and weft of the subject’s unconscious, follows the development of language and therefore, the subject’s entrance into the Symbolic order and his submission to the *nom-du-père*. The *automaton*, is related to this chain of signifiers as it refers to the “the return, the coming back, the insistence of the signs by which we see ourselves governed by the pleasure principle.” It is this determination by signifiers that is the underlying structure of the compulsion to repeat while *tuché* is the encounter with the Real, that which escapes signification and which causes the compulsion to repeat. *Tuché* lies behind the *Automaton* as that unknowable (because it precedes the entrance into language and thus cannot be captured by it) unconscious cause of repetition. *Automaton* is that which repeats (repetitive automatism) while *tuché* is that which determines what is repeated. It is akin to trauma, as an encounter with the real which is always a missed encounter because the real is unassimilable within the network of signifiers that order our understanding of self and the external world, meaning the conscious mind.

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529 Jacques Lacan, “Tuché and Automaton”, 54. The pleasure principle is the Freudian concept referring to the subject’s compulsion to avoid displeasure while directing attention towards the experience of pleasure.

by the automatistic repetitions that have an apparently accidental origin and determine all that follows…. what is repeated is fortuitous and accidental; that it is repeated is necessary and determined.”

Considering this in relation to Eros/ion, EXPORT’s repetitive return to the shards of glass imprinting her body, is in keeping with the repetitive return to the moment of one’s determination (entrance into language which implies the severing of the bond with the mother) which, unconsciously, is a traumatic experience. EXPORT enacts the signifying chain, the automaton, while bringing to the surface of visibility the traumatic encounter, known only by its effect, on the surface of her skin and the paper upon which she subsequently rolls her body. In short, the work makes visible the compulsion to repeat in a manner which brings to consciousness that which is unconscious; a compulsion to repeat stemming from a traumatic entrance into the social world and the resulting endless process of signification which constitutes us as subjects, as well as the repetitive and self-defeating behaviours performed in attempting to maintain order (pleasure) and avoid chaos (displeasure). Applied to collective trauma, this then points to recursive history and to the failures resulting from a collective drive directed towards avoiding chaos and maintaining order. Order, in this case, manifests itself as the securing of material needs which, under capital, implies the submission to the wage and to the abstraction of value from one’s productive capacity. Conversely, it manifests itself as the morally corrupt exploitation of fellow human beings for profit, regardless of the wounding consequences. Necessarily, this gravitational pull towards order is hitched to time’s

insubordination of nature since it adopted the rhythm of unequal exchange.\textsuperscript{532} The maintenance of order, therefore, takes on the form of recursion or the constantly repeated establishment of conditions which prioritize the uninterrupted acquisition of the equivalent form, or the wage, upon which the satisfaction of needs depends. Before continuing, a redefinition of the term “need” is required in regard to the social and economic context of the 1960s and 70s. In \textit{One Dimensional Man} (1964), Herbert Marcuse discusses the conformist attitudes towards the irrational character of advanced technological society in the 1960s. One of the key elements of submission to those conditions is the economic climate’s rapid creation of false needs, socially and culturally preconditioned and severed from actual biological needs. He says:

False (needs) are those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression: the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery and injustice…Such needs have a societal content and function which are determined by external powers over which the individual has no control… No matter how much such needs may have become the individual’s own, reproduced and fortified by the conditions of his existence…they continue to be what they were from the beginning — products of a society whose dominant interest demands repression.\textsuperscript{533}

He continues on to argue that these needs, involve alleviating the misery which slavery to a wage entails, thus hampering a consciousness of servitude crucial to liberation. The freedom

\textsuperscript{532} See Alliez, \textit{Capital Times}, 1-25.

\textsuperscript{533} Marcuse, \textit{One Dimensional Man}, 5. For more see pages 5-8.
to satisfy one’s false needs only “sustains social controls over a life of toil and fear” and in doing so, sustains alienation.” Thus, needs severed from biology, exacerbate the individual corporeal alienation which lies at the root of social separation, with time forever dictating the recursive re-establishment of conditions which facilitate the satisfaction of those needs and the perpetuation of unconscious servitude.

The repetitive voluntary return to the shards and to the glass pane display both this ever increasing submission to existing conditions described by Marcuse, with every recursive cycle. Furthermore, the interplay between the two material states, shattered and intact, one dangerous and the other not, which the artist seems to ignore, speaks to the lack of distinction between the state of freedom and unfreedom expressed by Marcuse. Accordingly, the work enacts a process of historical recursion in which the subject, and thus the collective, participates, perpetuating repression.

**Re-presentation: Collapsing Figure and Flesh**

In the opening pages of *Eros and Civilization* (1955), Marcuse’s philosophical inquiry into the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud, he offers what could be considered a Freudian answer to the question of *hamartia*. And this, in a manner that directly involves the body as part of the natural world of instinctual, somatic, libidinal drives which civilizing processes have done much to maintain under control whether through moral guilt, rational thought or toil. Marcuse says: “According to Freud, the history of man is the history of his repression. Culture constrains not only his societal but also his biological existence, not only parts of the

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human being but his instinctual structure itself.”\textsuperscript{535} The suppression of basic life instincts, the satisfaction of needs, especially those which encompass mankind’s natural sexual drives can be mapped historically in the cultural and economic trajectory previously explored; in Christianity’s sexual shaming, in reason’s sublation of irrational passions and in capitalism’s funneling of sexual energies into productive work, and all this made manifest in the eventual primacy of the reproductive monogamous couple form.\textsuperscript{536} Repression, as previously argued, is exacerbated for women who, historically, have been placed in a position of subordination through their exclusion from the wage, leaving them largely dependant on the couple form for survival.\textsuperscript{537}

In 1968, with the action \textit{Tapp und Task Kino}, EXPORT substituted film with her body and the space of the cinema with the public space of the street. The action sought to tackle sexual taboos while interrogating the voyeurism implied by the cinematic experience along with the specific question of film’s representation, commodification and mediation of the fe-


\textsuperscript{536} See Randall Halle, “What is Queer Philosophy” in \textit{Philosophy in Multiple Voices} ed. by George Yancy. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 81-108. Halle says: “Indeed the history of philosophy that dominated in the West relied on the reproductive monogamous couple to accomplish domination. Recall that from at least the seventeenth century onward, for a host of liberal philosophers like Kant grappling with morality, their discussion of rights did not lead to a general consideration of ownership and private property but to an estimation of a particular form of the household present in the merchant and middle class. In the course of three centuries is philosophical development, the bourgeois nuclear household, as a site of hetero-coital activity, came to define the parameters of rationality, naturalness, morality, ethics, citizenship, civil society, sociability, revolutionary subjectivity and so on. The desiring individual, aberrant from this particular from of heterosexual activity, came to define the irrational, abnormal, inhumane, immoral, unethical, unreasonable, corrupt, selfish, excessive, uncontrolled, wandering, antisocial, serial and so on.”(92-93).

\textsuperscript{537} This condition of dependance of course predates capitalism. The point I wish to make it that condition is directly related to their reproductive function.
male body. In the performance, she makes the body, usually inaccessible to the viewer due to its confinement to the screen, available to experience directly to anyone passing by on the street. Equipped with a cardboard box covering her naked torso and her gaze meeting the viewer’s directly, EXPORT, accompanied by Peter Weibel, encouraged people to experience her in the flesh by reaching through the front curtain of the box and fondling her bare breasts. Disregarding the socially and culturally prescribed rules governing and policing women’s bodies, and in the public space of the street, EXPORT freely invites the passers-by to connect with her on a haptic level, in a manner which forces an acknowledgement of her personhood through encounter with the flesh and confrontation with the gaze. As Mueller suggests, “The voyeurism is undercut by reversing the cinematic viewing situation.”

Within the theatre, the viewer is free to cast an objectifying gaze onto the female body projected onto the screen while in the case of Tapp und Task Kino, the participant’s gaze is met with EXPORT’s. Furthermore, this occurs as the person experiences her body physically without having the expected visual access to it. EXPORT called the piece a “true woman’s film” as it allowed for a woman to be fully in charge of the means of representation. Also, returning to my earlier discussion regarding the organic quality of film as material, the film in this case, is in fact replaced by a true woman’s body. The confinement of the female body as imprint on film itself, is usurped, collapsing the space between ideal representation and real body, figure and flesh. With this, the entire art historical trajectory of the female nude and its consumption by

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538 See Mueller, VALIE EXPORT, 15-17.

539 Ibid., 16.

540 Ibid., 18.
the male gaze is brought to a disruptive conclusion. From its beginnings, the art historical archetype of the female nude has been constructed by, and for, a male gaze. She is a model of female sensuality and sexual availability, supported by her usually reclined position and her averted gaze which communicate a passivity towards the viewer who is free to look upon her. Her exposed body, made acceptable by her association with mythical or biblical characters, by the mid-nineteenth century became a locus of modernist experimentation; a site of rebellion against the sacrality of academic conventions as well as a site upon which to expose the violence of the modern condition. Returning to the gaze, a crucial part of the construction of woman in art practice through the figure of the female nude, was her ignorance or disregard of her status as object of a gaze. In the case where she does return the viewer’s gaze, her relationship to the person in the position of the viewer usually communicates ownership or submission due to an established transaction, whether marital or sexual. For example, Titian’s *Venus of Urbino*’s matrimonial context or Ingres’ *Grande Odalisque*’s status as a concubine, render them sexually available to the person they look at. Manet’s *Olympia* and Picasso’s *Les Demoiselles D’Avignon*’s services, on the other hand, can be purchased, thus they are offering themselves to the person towards whom their gazes are directed, albeit at a price. The depiction of women in painting, therefore, mirrors their position within a gendered division of labour which has made her dependant on men and on the exchange of her body’s sexual capacity. Within film and the visual culture of the twentieth century, as decried by EXPORT in *Woman’s Art* and articulated in Laura Mulvey’s seminal essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, the construction of woman as passive object to man’s active gaze picked up where her depiction in painting left off. Mulvey says:
In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for a strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. Women displayed as sexual object is the leitmotif of erotic spectacle: from pin-up to striptease, from Ziegfried to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire.541

While the representation of women has hinged on an eroticism leveraged by an accessibility that is limited to the gaze and on the culturally constructed understanding that woman exists for male erotic pleasure, EXPORT’s Tapp ind Task Kino reverses the dynamic by withdrawing visual access to her nude body and forcing the physical encounter. Her gaze, confronting the viewer’s directly, disrupts the passive eroticism which the image of women in painting and cinema has perpetuated. By eliminating the mediating factor of paint or film, and by enfleshing the object of the gaze and removing it from the confines of the canvas or celluloid, she collapses the space between the viewer and the viewed while stripping the traditional viewer of the privileged viewing position as well as that position’s objectifying power in the process. Passivity gives way to confrontation, and objectification to self-determination.

The public character of the action is also a crucial factor in its disruption of the visual interplay usually permitted by painting and film. The intention was to interrupt the privileged mode of viewing provided by the cinematic experience where darkness and the very nature of the space of the theatre presuppose a private viewing experience. The viewer is free to look, and as the process of objectification of the female body has no audience itself, it is unseen and therefore remains unproblematic. The action reverses the spatial and visual parameters of the cinematic experience, as well as the process of objectification by making the experience public and providing fulfillment of the erotic wish. In the space of the streets, the “viewer” is invited to experience a “real” woman through touch, thus engaging in an embodied confrontation with her personhood. The viewer must also confront the artist’s gaze in the process, or at least is aware of her gaze upon them while they experience her body. Furthermore, it is the viewer who, in the act of intimate touching, a form of “haptic voyeurism” so to speak, is being viewed, reversing the process of objectification which occurs in an actual cinema. The viewer is the object of the gaze, that of the artist and of the audience. The participant is also caught in the voyeuristic act. The anonymity and privacy of the viewing experience is removed as is that of the sexual encounter which the fondling of breasts would suggest. Herein lies the crux of EXPORT’s dialectical détournement of Lacan’s previously discussed shared condition of the gaze. EXPORT definitively exposes, with Tapp und Task Kino and Genital Panic, that although shared, the experience of that shared condition is vastly different, dictated by a historically contingent and socially upheld imbalance of power and therefore split along gender lines.

542 See Mueller, VALIE EXPORT, 15-18.
EXPORT claims that the action was a reclamation of her own body through her choice to expose it. She does so through the gesture of symbolic unveiling enacted by the invitation extended to the viewer to touch. She thus affronts laws of propriety and takes ownership of that which has been historically and legally owned by a man within the context of a patriarchal society. The work, much like Genital Panik, attempts to disrupt the process of objectification and determination implied by the gaze and to which the female body has been forced to submit.

In closing, woman’s sexual and reproductive capacity has been harnessed by capital while intellectual and ideological discourse has deemed her to be a subordinate being thus compromising her control over or ownership of her own body. Her body occupies a double bind, whereby it has been kept concealed or its movement controlled in order to lessen its disruptive potential, while conversely being constructed as sexual object, especially within the mass media context of the postwar period which EXPORT specifically denounced in Woman’s Art. Repression for women, therefore, is specifically tied to their bodies and their sexuality which EXPORT, in Genital Panik and Tapp und Task Kino, addresses via defiant gestures of non-participation and through the rejection of the social and cultural norms which have confined women and defined them in relation to men and as being in service. These works specifically play with the revealing and concealing of the body within public space. They reclaim control of the female body’s construction and consumption, and therefore, its

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543 Mueller, in VALIE EXPORT, quotes Export as saying: “it is woman’s first step from object to subject. She disposes of her breasts freely and no longer followed social prescriptions; the fact that everything happens on the street and the consumer can be anybody, i.e. man or woman, constitutes an undisguised infraction of the homosexuality taboo.” (18).
mediation by cultural processes. She does this through acts of confrontation deploying the disruptive potential of the female body which has historically caused it to be kept under strict control.

EXPORT’s actions are both acts of self-determination and acts of strike against an imposed way of being which is directly related to her body, as well as to the discourse and political economy which mediates it. Her gestures, specifically in relation to the unveiling of her body (Genital Panik) or granting access to it (Tapp und Task Kino), perform Lonzi’s new consciousness. They dismantle her sexual objectification and her position as private property, while rejecting the choice imposed by the struggle against male power of either equality or difference, that choice implying a compliance with its norms and rules. By making visible the body’s status as surface of inscription, she demonstrates, in an embodied manner, the historical and cultural processes which have wounded the body and caused its political significance, its matter and its “mattering,” to gradually dissolve. She does so in a manner that the Actionists could not by virtue of her position as a woman. By occupying the normative subject position, the Actionists' work, while calling attention to the body as the root of a historically contingent collective body problem, as well as to the ideological, intellectual and economic factors which contributed to it, embodied the hamartia which has propelled recursion. Their positions as male artists, while gaining some traction through radical acts of refusal, functioned to bolster a social and cultural reality which has been created by and for them. EXPORT’s position as a woman, as heterogeneous to a male social reality, allows her to expose that which occupied the Actionists’ blind spot. However, EXPORT’s own privilege must be considered, a stumbling block that her own work abruptly comes up against. When interviewing
EXPORT in the fall of 2016, I asked her whether or not she deemed her work in the 1960s and 1970s to be successful in terms of addressing female subjugation. Her answer was no. She explained that while at an event in New York celebrating her role in radical feminist art practice, a woman of colour decried her white bourgeois status, arguing that EXPORT’s feminism could only speak to that particular position. Her work was, therefore, created within and upheld those privileged parameters. EXPORT agreed.\(^\text{544}\)

Though the alienation experienced by women is particular due to the instrumentalization of their most intimate physical functions and the affective labour which accompanies it, in service of the dominant order, EXPORT’s inability to address the determination of and varying degrees of subordination experienced by people who do not occupy a white or heteronormative subject position, dilutes the radical potential of the work. It demonstrates that, regardless of intention, blind spots are inevitable. One’s mediation by the dominant order and one’s specific position in relation to it, limits a full understanding or consideration of the whole. Mediation thus emerges as the stumbling block to a totalizing view and to the collective dismantling of hamartia.

\(^{544}\) VALIE EXPORT in an interview with the author. September, 2016. Vienna, Austria.
Conclusion

Civilization is first of all progress in work — that is, work for the procurement and augmentation of the necessities of life...


Capitalism, as a social economic system, is necessarily committed to racism and sexism. For capitalism must justify and mystify the contradictions built into its social relations — the promise of freedom vs. the reality of widespread coercion, and the promise of prosperity vs. the reality of widespread penury — by denigrating the “nature” of those it exploits: women, colonial subjects, the descendants of African slaves, the immigrant displaced by globalization.


The work of the male Actionists gave form to a historically contingent individual and collective bodily wounding, as well as to the theoretical query pertaining to the failure of collective resistance in the aftermath of 1968, posited by figures such as Alain Badiou, and which will be examined in this concluding chapter. While their revolt was enacted against the established order; aesthetic, cultural and socio-political, their continued dialogue with painting and, in some cases, with a hyper-masculine abstract expressionist visual language, speaks to their continued operation within the institutions in place. Furthermore, as the previous chapters have argued, their use of female participants in a manner which mirrors and mimics existing heteropatriarchal power dynamics, further displays the firm placement of their revolt within the confines of a masculinist structured reality, one which privileges their subject position. While their work drew attention to the grounding of alienation and social separation within the material body as the target of culture, state and capital’s latent and real violence, their work demonstrates a tone deafness to the totality of oppression especially in regard to
the discursive construction of sexual difference and its oppressive consequences. They give aesthetic form to history’s *hamartia*, and to Alain Badiou’s understanding of the proletariat’s application of objective force, by way of revolt, within the objective dialectic (or reality) and which he outlined in *Theory of the Subject* (2013).  

Beyond proposing an underlying matrix composed of a dialectical relationship between alienation and recursion, or historical myopia, the previous chapters have endeavoured to map out a historically contingent collective body problem and have traced the political and cultural means deployed to amend it since the rise of the modern state; through rational democratic process and free enterprise on the one hand, and through the re-naturalization of man and the establishment of an aesthetic state on the other. Both models, as per the dialectics of Enlightenment and Romanticism, have proven to be equally vocal notes in the development of aesthetic modernity and in the rise of the modern state’s contradictory mandate to suture broken social ties, while holding the monopoly on violence which it freely deploys against citizens. This project has also espoused a temporal model bookended by moments of rupture which function first, as a point of initiation of specific political and economic conditions and, to a point of climax when the exploitative and oppressive nature of those conditions had come sharply into focus. As the previous paragraph concludes, the Actionists, while giving concrete form to the abstract experience of corporeal alienation, also bolstered existing forms of oppression by operating within their parameters and re-inscribing existing modes of subordination. VALIE EXPORT’s work, on the other hand, calls attention to forms

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of oppression related to biological difference, forms which her male counterparts, in the midst of a 1960s consumer culture boom in which the objectification of women was increasingly normalized, were unable to effectively consider or address in their work. Their relative failure and her relative success cannot, however, be reduced to her position as marginalized cipher of sexual difference, but rather to her implicit engagement with the determination of the body by social, cultural and political processes. The Actionists’ procedural violence offered a (re)action to processes of determination which led to social separation and repression, while giving that repressed and brutalized state a concrete form through body and paint. EXPORT instead made those processes visible. She unveiled the means by which they bear down on the body and exposed how bodily difference exacerbates already existing repressive states by excluding or further marginalizing the “othered” body from political and social processes while normalizing that exclusion, rendering it invisible. She exposes social fragmentation along the axis of gender which her male counterparts ignored, highlighting their shortsightedness as well as their (s)placement within the dominant structure.\textsuperscript{546}

In her 1973 performance \textit{Kausalgia}, EXPORT enacted both the body’s determination by civilizing processes and that determination’s impact on the female subject specifically. The three part performance begins with the projection of an image of the ritual cutting of a tribal novice accompanied by a text which states that the process of cutting enacts the body’s position as site of inscription. It states: “Just as the animal is branded as somebody’s property

\textsuperscript{546} I add the “s” in front of “place” to allude to Badiou’s \textit{splace} in \textit{Theory of the Subject}. The term refers to the space of placement through which structured reality is constituted (the bourgeois world) from a topological viewpoint or in spatial terms. See Badiou, \textit{Theory of the Subject} (2009).
in the course of the socialization of nature, the human being is embedded in society through the body…The initiation ritual shows concretely how the human being is fitted into the social mythology and structure through the body.”\textsuperscript{547} The intent of this portion of the performance requires little elaboration. It summarizes the argument made above regarding the totality of EXPORT’s approach in terms of her work functioning not as a mere reaction but rather as an unveiling of the brutality of civilizing processes and the symbolic and real violence they inflict upon the body directly.

In the second portion of the performance, EXPORT chisels a hole into a wall which acted as the surface of the image projection and then cuts the clothes off a fellow female performer. The accompanying text alludes to the notion that clothing is another form of social disciplining. The removal of the clothing is symbolic of the “liberation which can be achieved through refusing social and institutional regulation and prescription.”\textsuperscript{548} The artist escapes the misogynist pitfalls of using another female participant, because the power imbalance implied by the male artist and female participant/muse in this case is absent. The cutting of the clothing here is however significant and consistent with the excision made in the crotch of her pants four years earlier with \textit{Genital Panik}. EXPORT employs the same procedural violence, the cut, deployed against material charged with concealing the body. Instead of imitating power’s latent violence inflicted on the body through actions as procedural violence, such as Brus’s \textit{Selbstverstümmelung}, EXPORT directs her gesture toward the material, a cipher for social discipline thus attacking civilizing processes directly. Instead of ex-

\textsuperscript{547} Mueller, \textit{VALIE EXPORT}, 36.

\textsuperscript{548} Ibid., 36.
posing mediation, she cuts away at one of its material manifestations within structured reality. This is also consistent with her chiseling of the projection surface. She punctures and cuts away at the plane upon which mediated reality is projected, speaking not only to the manufactured realities of mass media, but also to a larger history of representation within Western art and visual culture. She burrows away at the surface of representation, attacking flatness and its sacrality to the modernist history of painting from which women were largely excluded. This assault on the picture plane had not only been explored by her male Viennese counterparts, whether by breaking it and turning it into a sculpture, replacing it with the body or sheets or even doing away with it completely, but had notably been done by Italian modernist artists in the immediate postwar. Lucio Fontana’s perforated monochromes declared an end to painting in the aftermath of the Bomb, in the midst of an American postwar recovery plan and “the acceleration of real abstraction” made formally manifest in the primacy of the gesture in American Abstract Expressionism.\textsuperscript{549} Just as Fontana, for whom the surface is less of a given implied by the medium, but rather one historically and culturally determined, for the surface implies the same cultural and historical determination but it is also that which determined the representation of women, distributing the construction of women as objects of male culture and history, or their immiseration in paint.\textsuperscript{550} The artist here attacks the physical surface of mediation, where the body’s determination by culture is made visually manifest through representation, either through paint or film.


\textsuperscript{550} For more on Lucio Fontana within the postwar context see Jaleh Mansoor, \textit{Marshall Plan Modernism} (2016).
The third portion of the performance addresses the question of woman more specifically, her body as site of biological difference and notions of femininity constructed for and by men which reduce her purpose to desirability as part of her worker function. A projection of EXPORT’s garter tattoo, *body sign action*, is accompanied by a text which states:

Woman is forced to represent…as bearer of fixed sexual symbols which are signs of a phallocentric society, in a way that does not correspond to her personal needs. Based on a system of biological differences, a sociological system of repression was erected, which woman can escape only by rejecting the body defined in this manner as feminine.  

The fourth part of the performance addresses women’s liberation from external determination. On the floor, written in chalk, are a swastika, the phrase *the human being is a medium of communication a bearer of symbols and information*, along with the words *order/lack of freedom, freedom/chaos*. A man standing on the swastika casts a shadow onto a wax plate on the floor. The outline of his shadow is then burned into the wax and the nude woman from the previous portion lies down within the outline. Her body is literally framed by the trace left behind by male culture or rather by its ubiquitous shadow. This point is made all the more poignant by the swastika, symbol of the violent consequences of phallocentric culture’s collision with the myth of the state qua Fatherland. The man then surrounds the woman’s body with an electrical wire connected to a live battery and her task is to roll across the wire onto a paper screen, much like that used in *Eros/ion*. Causalgia, which refers to a severe pain

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552 For more description and images of *Kausalgia* see Mueller, *VALIE EXPORT*, 41.
experienced in one’s limbs as a result of peripheral nerve damage, is a syndrome which is yet to be fully understood by the medical community. The cause of pain and, therefore, its cure are still unknown. Some believe that the sympathetic nervous system which controls involuntary bodily activity, such as the heart beat, blood flow and reactions such as goose bumps, plays a large role in the cause of causalgia. Naming the performance *Kausalgia* alludes to the unseen or unacknowledged aspects of external definition and the oppressive, or “painful” ways in which they operate. In the performance, EXPORT describes the pain experienced by the electrical wires as “‘white causalgia,’ the light pain of liberation, as opposed to ‘black causalgia,’ the dark pain of oppression in the shadow realm of man.” Here EXPORT presents not only the processes of determination along with their impact on the body, but the conscious choice and action that takes the subject out of the dominant structure of mediation or rather out of the Badiouian objective dialectic, where emergence as a subject is possible.

**Now What?: Theory and Praxis after 1968**

As the theory of historical recursion explored in this dissertation would predict, this inquiry into the body and social separation ends in the same manner as the proposed *longue durée* and the Viennese outburst of action art in the 1960s and 70s: with a deferred return to yet another beginning. While the events of 1968, stretching into the 1970s with the feminist movement, antiwar protest and environmental activism yielding a certain amount of social


reform, it did not succeed in breaking down the political and economic conditions set in place in the aftermath of the events of 1848. The Marxist spirit which fuelled 1968 ultimately resulted in the political conservatism of the 1970s as opposed to the triumph of the Left, leaving it to grapple with the chasm between theory and praxis. The unrest of 1968 did not succeed in overthrowing any governments or power structures and, in keeping with hamartia and Marx’s lament in the wake of 1848 regarding repetition and the conjuring of old revolutionary ghosts and goals, it only sought reform within the social and political power structures in place. At the end of our long century, with the state now firmly assuming its role as a system external to the citizen body, and with the maintenance and growth of capitalism as an integral part of its postwar ideology, the reaction to this wave of unrest was “new acts of political reinforcement by leaders around the world, often in collaboration with one another.” As Marx argued in the 18th Brumaire, capitalism’s maturation since the Great Revolution was partly to blame for the failures of 1848. The same, of course, can be said of 1968. In the midst of the Cold War, protecting the interests of capitalism, as synonym for freedom and liberal values, became an ideological matter that further blurred the line between it and democracy, narrowing the dialectic between base and superstructure. Furthermore, by the 1960s, technological innovation and the exponential rise of consumer culture encouraged the


acquisition of goods and the attainment of a certain lifestyle as part of a liberal ideology. The
greater population was, therefore, less inclined to sacrifice the benefits accompanying im-
provement in their overall quality of life, especially a mere twenty-odd years following the
experience of extreme scarcity during the second World War.\textsuperscript{558}

Capitalism’s reproduction of its own conditions and its simultaneous creation of false
needs, which Marcuse lamented in \textit{One Dimensional Man}, only served to further quell com-
mmitment to revolutionary change or even knowledge of one’s oppressed state.\textsuperscript{559} Instead, ra-
tional democratic process, itself a product of an uncritical Western fetishization of the civilizing
projects of a classical past, continued to be understood as a peaceful means of amending
social separation. The extent of the paradox implied by the Western political project of civili-
ity and inclusion, beyond Agamben’s theorization in terms of its definition by that which it
juridically excludes, is here further exposed and was made formally manifest with the pro-
cedural violence of the Vienna Actionists. The state’s monopoly on violence along with the
latent violence implicit in the discursive and historical trajectory which gave rise to the very
fractures within the social body that it conversely, and ironically sought to counter, is again
overlooked and its established parameters are turned to in moments of crisis. This very cir-
cumstance is given voice in the German student movement’s leader Rudolf Dutschke’s fa-


\textsuperscript{559} See Louis Althusser, \textit{On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and the Ideological State Appa-
mous slogan **der lange Marsch durch die Institutionen**, and makes manifest the pitfalls implied by *hamartia* as well as Marx’s unheeded historical lesson from the **18th Brumaire**. It also speaks to Badiou’s criticism in *Theory of the Subject*, regarding the dilution of May ’68’s revolt “into peaceful, protesting, infra-political figures” within his greater theorization on the possibility of a revolutionary break from within structured reality.

Badiou’s goal, in *Theory of the Subject*, is to rescue Marxist historicism in the aftermath of Stalinism and the failure of May 1968, from its reduction to a mere “science of history” as espoused by Althusser and to offer a theory of the revolutionary subject. Unpacking the dialectic of force within history and politics, composed of the subjective and objective dialectic applied to the bourgeoisie and the proletariat as the contradictory agents of history (since 1848 as this inquiry has argued), Badiou contends that the subjective force, class politics among the people, is common to both camps with the exception of the party being exclusive to the proletariat. The antagonism between the two however, plays itself out within the realm of reality, or history, reminding us that history is made by the masses. He says:

> It is clear that the point of application of the bourgeois subjective force within the *splace* is intended to prevent the constitution out of place of the proletarian subjective force. The fundamental target of subjective activity is therefore to block the processes of concentration (of purification) of the antagonistic force.

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562 Badiou is careful to refute the notion of Marxism as mere science of history by stating that one must never abandon the notion that “Marxism is the discourse with which the proletariat sustains itself as subject.” (Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, 44).
It is a matter of maintaining the latter maximally diluted at all cost, even if this dilution is made up of innumerable revolts.\textsuperscript{563}

The objective forces within structured reality in the case of the bourgeoisie are relations of exploitation and control of the state, exactly the conditions set in place in the aftermath of 1848 as per Marx. In the case of the proletariat, the objective force is mass revolts, as evidenced by recursive ruptures (or “history” as history is made by the masses).\textsuperscript{564} With this, Badiou appears to highlight what this study has called \textit{hamartia}:

It is always in the interest of the powerful that history is to be mistaken for politics, that is, the objective (that which exists within the dominant structure in place) is taken for the subjective. This is the natural element for the maintenance of their own subjective activity, which is applied so that no unaligned quality may come to concentrate itself to confront them.\textsuperscript{565}

In other words, this misreading of history on one hand and the mass revolts against state and capitalist exploitation which occur within the structured reality (thus within/through/employing the language of the institutions in place), function only to maintain that structured reality, even strengthening it with each weak attempt to overthrow it.

\textsuperscript{563} Badiou, \textit{Theory of the Subject}, 43. “Splace” is the term used by Badiou to designate the “space of placement” within structured reality. It can be understood in terms of the Lacanian symbolic order.

\textsuperscript{564} See Badiou’s schema in \textit{Theory of the Subject}, 43.

\textsuperscript{565} Badiou, \textit{Theory of the Subject}, 44.
As the last chapter indicated, EXPORT was forced to contend with the shortsightedness of her own emancipatory practice, admitting that her work offered a perspective which was white and bourgeois.\footnote{Interview with VALIE EXPORT by the author. September, 2016. Vienna, Austria} The experience of racial difference, one which EXPORT’s work clearly could not give voice to, as well as her engagement with a Western art historical and cultural framework, in retrospect, highlights the work’s inability to address the alienation experienced by the subaltern subject and to the problem of social separation in its nuanced totality. How, then, can the political potency of collective finite materiality be addressed without abolishing History? That is, without effacing the very real historical experiences of violence and subjugation, experienced at various intersections and degrees of marginalization, which have contributed to fragmentation within the social and political body. One way of accessing these intersections of marginalization would be engaging with how capitalism itself functioned to determine certain bodies as worker bodies due to bodily difference.\footnote{It is import for me to stress here that the concept of race is a “biological fiction but a social fact.” Olson, The Abolition of White Democracy, 9. Therefore non-white people are victims of external determination by a dominant white culture, just as women are by a dominant male culture.} EXPORT, as the previous chapter has shown, exposes the female body as one externally defined by a male discursive history and facilitated by phallocentric visual culture, as an object whose state-of-being is work in service of man and the societal structure it created; whether through sexual availability and obligation, or reproductive labour. Works such as Genital Panik do speak to a materiality held in common among women gendered as such at birth which is directly related to their external definition by male culture around which a collective orientation, transcending racial difference without abolishing its history and present stakes,
may be negotiated.\textsuperscript{568} It is the failure of second-wave feminism to have missed this opportunity, this transracial solidarity, just as it was the mistake of the American white worker not to align itself with a black working class following the Civil War in the United States.\textsuperscript{569} As Joel Olson states in his book \textit{The Abolition of White Democracy}, “the flip side of white wages was Black subordination.”\textsuperscript{570} While a direct engagement with capital and labour in regards to the biological basis for women’s subjugation under capital, and in relation to the greater class struggle which omitted to properly include the unique position of women and the struggles they face, was vigorously undertaken at the time in places like Italy for example, it failed to properly engage with the particular struggles faced by non-white women in relation to the same issues.\textsuperscript{571} For example, the outsourcing of domestic labour to a non-white workforce facilitated the integration of white women into the job market.

Despite what can be described retrospectively as the Actionists’ and EXPORT’s narrow scope, the corporeal grounding of their emancipatory gestures did foreshadow what

\textsuperscript{568} I purposefully mention “the body in relation to external definition” here to avoid being trans-exclusive in my argument. My argument here does not consider how an individual identifies in terms of gender or sexual orientation, no more than phallocentric culture does. I wish here to highlight that the discrimination trans women face is related to that which women gendered as such face. In that the category of woman, within existing reality, is culturally and historically contingent upon the brutal process of external definition or gendering based on biological difference.


In the \textit{Abolition of White Democracy}, Joel Olson traces the history of American Democracy and its inherent racism through the notion of American racial privilege. He speaks of the reconstruction, borrowing from W. E. Du Bois, saying: Taken for granted by both sides during the war, the white working class was the swing constituency during the Reconstruction, Du Bois maintains. If the white proletariat would join the Black proletariat and defend the gains of reconstruction, the power of this united class would be unstoppable and ‘we would be living today in a different world’.” (12-13)

\textsuperscript{570} Joel Olson, \textit{The Abolition of White Democracy}, 14.

\textsuperscript{571} I am speaking here about the \textit{Wages for Housework} campaign which although starting in the Veneto region in Italy, became a transnational phenomena.
some theorists of ’68 believed to be key to liberation from capitalist hegemony within a Post-
Fordist context, as well as to the redemption of Marxism in the aftermath of French theory’s 
post ’68 rebuke: corporeality itself or rather the corporeal consequences of a political econo-
my of labour power. For this, one must look away from the dominant French model towards 
a Central European one, which grew out of the West German ’68 student movement and the 
Frankfurt School’s debates between theory and praxis. One which opposes French poststruc-
turalist dismissal of labour; the work of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge in History and Ob-
stinacy (1981). Touted as the completion of Marx’s Capital, Negt and Kluge propose a polit-
ical economy of labour power, thus effectively rescuing labour and the proletariat’s position 
as a potentially revolutionary force in a post-’68 context. This also radically reorients a 
Marxist conception of history. Negt and Kluge challenge the Marxist notion of history as one 
which traces the immiseration of the proletariat (whose subjection allows for the possibility 
for emancipation making it the subject of that history) within the progression of accumula-
tion and “social abundance,” with a history understood through the lens of a theory on the 
obstinate corporeal depths of the worker body, that which makes it resistant to capital’s ex-
ploration. In the aftermath of the failures of ’68, and the dismissal of the proletariat as the 
revolutionary subject of a history marked by capitalist exploitation, Negt and Kluge abandon 

572 See Stewart Martin, “Political Economy of Life,” Radical Philosophy 190 (Mar/Apr 2015): 
and New Perspectives, edited by Daniel J. Sherman, Ruud van Dijk, Jasmine Alinder, A. Aneesh 
(Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013), 49-72. 
Devin Fore, “Introduction” in Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt’s History and Obstinacy eds. Devin 

573 To Negt and Kluge, in Marx’s outlining of the process of production and consumption which is 
echoed in Marcuse’s work as well, social abundance is “paid for by the individual impoverishment of 
productive forces.” Negt and Kluge, History and Obstinacy, 126.
Marx’s conception of the proletariat being the redeemer of that history. Instead, they locate the proletariat’s redemptive agency in what they call “proletarian traits” by “reconceiving it as the subject of the history of obstinacy towards” this exploitation. Thus, history in itself is a history of labour power’s ingrained (natural) and inherited (historical) capacity to resist the destructive nature of capital, with this capacity being intimately connected to the body and psychic makeup of the worker.

The erosion of a corporeal dimension to labour, seemingly disembodied and no longer entailing an engagement with the sensuous world due to the technological innovations of the latter half the twentieth century, speaks not only to the material grounds for social separation but also to the impasse in transcending it in terms of Marxist thought. Meaning that this de-materialization appeared to imply the loss of labour’s emancipatory potential, and thus its dismissal within discourse after 1968. However this corporeal aspect of labour has never been lost, just occluded by capital’s capacity to generate value from every aspect of daily life, made increasingly evident with the transition to post-industrial society following ‘68.

Richard Langston, in *Palimpsest of ’68: Theorizing Labour after Adorno* says

> The era’s clashes over theory and praxis rested upon a much larger unresolved issue, namely, the technological transformation of labour… while massive pools of labour power toil around the globe today over virtual networks, for

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575 Ibid., 31.


example, the demands of our current political economy still exact the same
real corporeal mortification that Marx originally attributed to manual
labour.\textsuperscript{578}

It is in this undeniable “soft tissue of capitalism”\textsuperscript{579}, the enduring corporeality of labour, through an examination of the political economy of labour power itself, where Negt and Kluge locate revolutionary potential.\textsuperscript{580} Adapting Marxist theory to a post-industrial era, it is not in the proletariat itself as a class, but in proletarian traits or “the repressed characteristics of man” resulting from historical and lived experience of disenfranchisement within capitalist relations, that Negt and Kluge locate this possibility for emancipation.\textsuperscript{581} In their anthropological excavation of capitalism’s expropriation of labour power, Negt and Kluge articulate a process of separation which occurs within the worker as a fundamental part of capitalist expansion. The violence of capitalism “migrates inwards” through the process of primitive accumulation, which they contend that what has been understood as a historical moment is instead “an ongoing process by which the logic of capital is interiorized and reproduced, over and over within the individual subject.”\textsuperscript{582} To Negt and Kluge, the aspects of living labour

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\textsuperscript{578} Richard Langston, “Palimpsest of ’68: Theorizing Labour after Adorno”, 52.

\textsuperscript{579} Devin Fore, “Introduction,” \textit{History and Obstinacy}, 22.

\textsuperscript{580} The body is explicitly outlined as central to Negt and Kluge’s emancipatory theory of a political economy of labour power. They say, “We are interested in the nature of cells, of skin, the body, the brain, the fixe senses, the societal organs erected upon them: loving, knowing, mourning, remembering, the sense of family, the hunger for meaning, the eyes of society, the attention of the collective. Some of these really exist; others only exist as a capacity never carried out, a protest or Utopia.”(As quoted by Richard Langston in “Palimpsest of ’68: Theorizing Labour after Adorno”, 60)

\textsuperscript{581} Devin Fore, “Introduction,” \textit{History and Obstinacy} 38.

\textsuperscript{582} Devin Fore, “Introduction,”\textit{History and Obstinacy}, 34.
\end{small}
which are immediately available for exploitation within the process of value creation and cast aside by capital are left uncultivated yet impoverished, disrupting both the psychological and biological make-up of the human being and, over time, come to linger within the collective unconscious. It is within that dustbin of traits, excluded from value formation that Negt and Kluge locate a well-spring of resistance, that is, of the subject’s obstinacy (Eigensinn) towards subsumption. Conversely, it is also due to their dismissal by capital that these repressed and resisting traits are not given credence in terms of their revolutionary potentiality. Devin Fore says this of obstinacy in his introduction to History and Obstinacy,

The words Eisgansinn...implies a degree of stubborn obtuseness, an imperviousness to direction from above. Hegel, for example, famously defined (it) as “a freedom” that is “enmeshed in servitude.” Kluge, in term describes (it) as “the guerilla warfare of the mind.” Obstinacy is the underside of history: for each entry on the vaporized record of human culture … a countervailing act of obstinacy pushed back against the thrust of so-called “progress.”

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583 Ibid., 35.
Negt and Kluge also speak of this in terms of human’s distancing themselves from their organic body in order to cope with their adaptation to the conditions of capitalism’s constant reproduction. With this distancing comes the acquisition of a bank of memories that are collective and “for this reason, uncannily foreign.”(29)
This further supports a corporeal basis to individual alienation and social separation, with the uncanny foreignness of collective memory acquired through the violent process of expropriation acting as a stumbling block towards overcoming them.

584 Ibid., 36.
585 Ibid., 36.
Thus labour power’s inward, natural and historically contingent resistance to domination must be constantly overcome and negotiated in order to actualize itself as labour. This self-regulation which constantly occurs in the worker to adapt to structured reality, and the countervailing obstinacy which resists it, emerge as a labour process itself. Hence, the theory's dubbing as a political economy of labour power. They reconfigure corporeality’s import to individual resistance and collective cohesion and of labour to a theory of emancipation, so reinstating praxis’ significance within a post-'68 critical theory which emerged out of the struggle itself. Negt himself said: “We are trying now to take seriously and integrate together the problems that were politically important during the student movement but were not worked through and instead were aborted and left hanging.” Here the body, labour and praxis come together to establish a theory and praxis grounded in the corporeal and psychical depths of the exploited, addressing Marx’s theory of capital’s lacunae in yielding a revolutionary program while conversely attempting to provide one. And this, within a post-'68, post-fascist Central European discourse, consistent with its inward looking ancestry (Nietzsche and Freud for example), which incorporates a non-linear understanding of history punctuated by repetition and collective failures. It appears that Negt and Kluge attempt to provide an answer to Marx’s concern regarding the “conjuring up of old ghosts,” which opens the 18th Brumaire and, too, this inquiry.

Richard Langston discusses Negt (assistant to Jurgen Habermas) and Kluge’s (Adorno’s protege and lawyer) work in relation to the student movement in West Germany in 1968 and Adorno’s emphasis on theory over “praxis’ impotence.” It situates History and Obstinacy as a text which not only grew out of the event of 1968 in Germany but the unresolved conflicts between the students and Adorno and the evacuation of labour from Leftist discourse in the 1970s. See Richard Langston, “Palimpsest of ’68: Theorizing Labour after Adorno,” (2013).


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The phantom existence of the past… can be suspended only through socially conscious, collective labour that will put an end to the deadly repetition compulsion and stem the return of the repressed. Transforming the cultural legacy into contemporary social forms, however, requires a process of engaging with history publicly, a process that cultivates learning impulses only under specific conditions.\textsuperscript{588}

Considering Negt and Kluge’s theorization of body, labour and resistance, in the wake of ’68’s deficiencies and the 1970s reactionary dismissals, in relation to a non-linear conception of history, the Vienna Actionist’s work, the University action Kunst and Revolution for example, as it has been framed in this inquiry, can be reconsidered as having foreshadowed Negt and Kluge’s “delayed” revolutionary prescription. That prescription retroactively speaks to the political import of the Actionists’ procedural violence and engagement with the body in terms of resistance towards forms of dematerialization and immiseration.\textsuperscript{589} That is, as purposive actions which wrestle praxis away from the logic of work, or labour under capital, thus asserting its importance in terms of resistance by engaging with those natural (i.e. bodily) and historically contingent, obstinate characteristics in a manner which “reveals the fragility of our conception of reality and of the socio-political (and culture—my addition) institutions that sustain it.”\textsuperscript{590} What the Actionists’ expose can be understood as this obstinacy…

\textsuperscript{588} Negt and Kluge as quoted by Devin Fore in “Introduction” to History and Obstinacy, 62.

\textsuperscript{589} I use praxis here purposefully when speaking of Actionism, in relation to the dismissal of labour or rather the correlation of labour with praxis

\textsuperscript{590} Devin Fore, “Introduction,” History and Obstinacy, 65.
cy towards an orientation to submit to domination, deeply rooted within the individual and collective body and psyche, unveiling its resistant propensity, though doing so at a time when the trauma of a Fascist past sidelined action, and the corporeal and emancipatory dimension of labour in the process, in favour of theory within critical discourse. Furthermore, formally, this is mirrored in their rebellion against the primacy of abstraction in painting, indeed to their rebellion against the historical domination of the structured parameters of painting itself, through the body’s assertion of materiality. However, both the theory and the praxis’ inability to address the varying strata of self-regulating processes or obstinacy towards systems of domination in relation to a history of exploitation contingent upon bodily difference remains, as highlighted by EXPORT’s rebuttal.

The corporeal dimension of labour never having evacuated women’s socially prescribed and biologically determined purpose, VALIE EXPORT’s performance appears as a sharp jab directed against phallocentric discourse on domination and resistance. By this I mean that women’s condemnation to the state of living labour remains, regardless of technological advancements. EXPORT’s work, as well as the rise of autonomist feminism in Italy in the 1970s which put women’s unwaged reproductive labour on the table, articulated what Negt and Kluge’s later contentions that the parameters of labour, beyond the wage or the factory floor, must be expanded. That is, to all aspects of life which now sustain the ability to work; its somatic, autonomic and psychical processes, is itself labour under capital. She exposes the development of self-regulating and obstinate traits for women, as extending beyond the historical limits of capital’s hegemony, reframing them as a result of male domination,
which has enacted upon the female body for millennia the same violence which capitalist exploitation has deployed upon the male worker over a mere century. Self-regulation, or the continual process of the self’s reorientation towards the conditions of and obligation to labour, is in her case framed as mediation and in women’s position as the objects of male history. Contrarily, obstinacy is made manifest in the immediacy of her flesh which she deploys to counter the process of mediation, or that which triggers self-regulation in the first place, unveiling it and stopping it in its tracks with the exposure of the site of sexual difference; the “given” site of her subordination. In Genital Panik therefore, obstinacy, as well as the historical processes which shaped and triggered it, emerge from beneath the flesh and psyche to render visible the corporeal foundations of domination while also restoring the body’s position, and thus labour as it is an ontic condition, within a discourse of resistance.

Finally, the collective body problem at the root of social separation can no longer be reduced to the experience of exploitation within the wage-labour relation. Not simply because historically, many have been excluded from that relation implying their political impotence, but also due to longstanding systems of domination and frameworks of exploitation which targeted the body as justification for subjugation. Systems and frameworks which capital reproduced and exploited. This highlights the necessity for a radical rereading or reconceptualization of history, of its ruptures and returns, as Negt and Kluge also suggest and which this study has attempted to undertake, as well as the necessity to address a plurality of histories within a dominant structured reality. That is, the various ways in which bodies, not simply that of the white waged worker, have adapted to changing historical conditions of
exploitation and have resisted those conditions, consciously or not, due to the rootedness of that experience of exploitation and conversely of resistance, in the flesh. While both Actionism and the events of 1968 left us with unsolved problems, the former foreshadowed critical theory’s retrospective assessment of a sensuous, corporeal exigency to emancipatory struggle in the face of 1968’s failures and the unfulfilled promise of marxism. Furthermore, its own longue durée into the 1970s and beyond, articulated a demand for expansion of labour’s scope, releasing it from its temporal or immediate value-forming constraints, a task well undertaken by Autonomist Marxists and Feminists in Italy in the 1970s. Nonetheless, the collective blindness to labour’s expansion to encompass every aspect of human life speaks to the persistence of hamartia and to the continued participation in capital’s reproduction. This concluding chapter opened with a quote by Sylvia Federici which speaks not only to the corporeal basis of capitalist exploitation, stating that capitalism justifies and mystifies the inherent contradictions built into its social relations by abasing the nature of those it exploits most fiercely, but also to the nature of these inherent contradictions: “the promise of freedom vs. the reality of widespread coercion, and the promise of prosperity vs. the reality of widespread penury.” Contrasted with Herbert Marcuse’s thoughts from his Marxist in-

591 Devin Fore says of Negt and Kluge’s historiography: “Revolutionary activity today entails as its corollary the kind of radical historiography practiced by Negt and Kluge, which draws connections between distant and noncontiguous episodes in time.” (66)

592 This corporeal exigency or the importance of making bodies visible, or discrimination and inequality on the basis of bodily difference, is increasingly relevant today with movements such as Black Lives Matter, Idle no More and #MeToo.

593 I am referring here to figures such Mario Tronti, Antonio Negri, Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Silvia Federici.

594 Federici, Caliban and the Witch, 17.
quiry into Freud, *Eros and Civilization* saying: “Civilization is first of all progress in work—that is, work for the procurement and augmentation of the necessities of life” it is apparent that this promise of freedom and prosperity is accessible only through labour, and thus through one’s continued adaptation to capitalism’s increasingly oppressive mechanisms, one of them being labour’s expansion.\textsuperscript{595} Ironically, labour is also conceived as the only means by which a consciousness of one’s oppression can be realized allowing for emancipation to be achieved only from within the boundaries of a structured reality. This may bring us closer to understanding *hamartia* as stemming from the unacknowledged historically and biologically contingent dialectical tension between participation, or self-regulation and sublimation, and resistance, or obstinacy. The latter being that which the Actionists, and EXPORT especially, endeavoured to give full, unmediated visibility.\textsuperscript{596}

\textsuperscript{595} Herbert Marcuse,*Eros and Civilization*, 81.

\textsuperscript{596} Marcuse, in *Eros and Civilization*, says this of sublimation: “The process of sublimation alters instinctual structures.” (83).
Fig. 1. *Kunst und Revolution* Poster, Vienna, 1968.
Fig. 2. Otto Muehl, Günter Brus, Oswald Wiener. *Kunst und Revolution* Poster, University of Vienna, 1968. Photograph by Khasaq.
Fig. 3. Hermann Nitsch, 5th Action Vienna, 1964. Photograph by Ludwig Hoffenreich & Sigfried Klein.
Fig. 4. Hermann Nitsch, *Oedipus*, 1990.
Fig. 5. Otto Muehl. *Leda mit dem Schwan*, 1964
Photograph by L. Hoffenreich.
Fig. 6. Otto Muehl. *Leda mit dem Schwan*, 1964
Photograph by L. Hoffenreich.
Fig. 7. Otto Muehl, *Material Aktion 17: O Tannenbaum*, 1964. Photograph by Marc Adrian.


Badura-Triska, Eva, Interview at MuMOK conducted by author in Vienna, AT. March 2016.


EXPORT, VALIE. Interview with the author. September, 2016. Vienna, Austria.


